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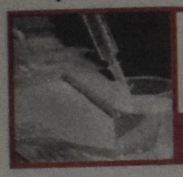

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60th year of publication

Iraq's worrisome constitution

Paul Marshall

The process of drafting Iraq's constitution has been chaotic, as evidenced in the confusing and contradictory final (so far) document. It is neither a template for an Islamist state nor a blueprint for a constitutional democracy. But depending on how the Iraqis handle it, it has elements that could be made to fit either.

The constitutional proposal was due August 15, but at the last minute the drafting commission requested a seven-day extension. When August 22 arrived, the Sunni participants still objected to the draft. A myriad of formal and informal negotiations followed between party and faction leaders, while commission and Parliament members complained they were sidelined. Differing drafts and fragments of drafts circulated around Baghdad and elsewhere while American pundits interpreted their meaning, often without knowing whether the draft they had was an accurate or even recent version.

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad had many sleepless nights as he pushed negotiators to find some compromise. At one point, even President Bush weighed in by phone. Amendments were being drafted until August 28, when finally a draft was submitted to the Parliament and approved by the country's political leadership. This version is being submitted to the country for an October 15 referendum.

Convention amid Conflict

Before criticizing the Iraqi negotiators, it is important to realize how difficult their life has been. They had to draft a charter for a country with no robust institutions capable of forming a stable framework for the new regime. Several of Iraq's neighbors worked to make them fail, and bitter internal ethnic and religious divisions, as well as radically differing visions compete for the country's future. Among the major items on the commission's agenda, apart from creating a whole new government, have been federalism (especially regarding the Kurds in the north), the division of oil revenues, and the relation of Islam to the law. They have had to do all this in a matter of months, before the critical eyes of a watching world.

Outside the commission's heavily protected meetings, more than 150,000 foreign troops have been battling with an unseen enemy that murders many more Iraqis than Americans. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's terrorist organization "Al Qaeda in Iraq" has again announced that all constitutional drafters are defying God by trying to make man-made laws instead of following Islamic law, Shari'ah. Zarqawi's "judicial court" ruled that "it is a duty to uphold God's law and kill those who have declared themselves God's partners in drafting this void constitution.... All those who write and support this constitution ... are apostates." Two of the drafters have already been killed by terrorists.

In comparison, the United States did not finalize its constitution until a decade after declaring independence. Though built on strong institutions and existing state constitutions, along with national consensus on most core issues, the U.S. Constitution was not accepted until the drafters agreed to add the Bill of Rights' ten amendments after ratification. The issue of slavery was deferred in order to get the acquiescence of the Southern states. It would come into force if only nine of the thirteen states accepted it. When George Washington was inaugurated for the first time in April 1789, Rhode Island and North Carolina were still outside the fold.

Iraq's leaders celebrate the new constitution

'A Fundamental Source'

Understanding what the Iraqis have produced requires a close reading of dense texts. Article 2 states that "Islam is the official religion of the state." This in itself need not create problems. Many states, including established democracies in Europe, have state religions, and the practice is not held to be in violation of international human-rights standards.

However, the same article says that Islam "is a fundamental source of legislation." But which version of Islam will be treated as a source, and who gets to say here what Islam is and what it requires? Will it be unelected Shiite or Sunni clerics?

Concern over this clause is tempered by the description of Islam as a, not the, source of legislation, which means that there will be other sources that could counterbalance an undefined Islam. Article 5, for

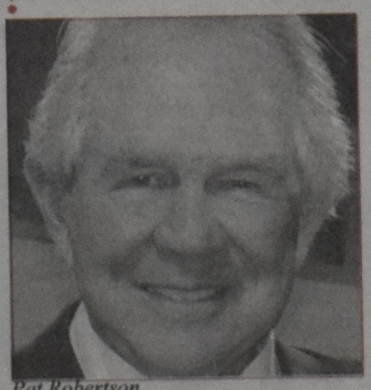
See Iraq *on page 2 ...*

Who is Chavez and why does Pat Robertson want to kill him?

Harry der Nederlanden

Much to the delight of Hugo Chavez, the flamboyant President of Venezuela, Pat Robertson, the anchor of the Christian Broadcast Network (and a one-time presidential candidate), suggested that the leftist president ought to be assassinated. Chavez has boosted his popularity at home and abroad by defying America, calling George Bush names, making sexual wisecracks about Condoleeza Rice and claiming that the U.S. is planning to assassinate him and invade his country. Robertson's statement only enhances his popularity.

But why did Pat Robertson say such a foolish thing?



Pat Robertson

Chavez is a wild and woolly populist leader, who was elected to his country's highest office in 1998 on a platform that condemned the excesses of the rich and the corruption of previous regimes and promised to greatly improve the conditions of the poor. His rhetoric was strongly Marxist. He promised a new socialist revolution, "a concrete utopia," and he heaped curses on the oligarchs, capitalism, imperialism, neo-liberalism and especially America.

Although Venezuela is a poor country without much military power, it is sitting on a huge pool of oil. In fact, Venezuela is the third largest source of oil for the U.S. providing some 10 percent of its oil imports. So Chavez cannot be ignored. He has been trying to rally third world countries to defy American domination. He has

See Chavez *on page 2 ...*

News

Iraq ... *continued from page 1*

example, says, "The people are the source of authority." But Islam is not only a source but a fundamental one, so its powers could be strong.

Similar concerns arise with Article 2's further requirement that "no law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam." Here it is important to note that there may be a difference between a law that contradicts Islam per se and one that contradicts its "established provisions." The implication is that such provisions would require virtual unanimity; this may be a check on some excesses.

A more important check is that Article 2 goes on immediately to add, "No law may be enacted that contradicts the principles of democracy" and "No law may be enacted that contradicts the rights and basic freedoms stipulated in this constitution." This combined theme that nothing should contradict Islam or democracy or guarantees of rights and freedoms reiterates the balancing pattern of Iraq's Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), the interim constitution passed under American occupation. While the current draft is weaker than the TAL, it could provide similar protections.

More worrying is yet another provision in Article 2: "This constitution shall guarantee the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people and shall guarantee the full religious rights of all individuals in the freedom of belief and religious practice to the followers of the Christian, Yazidis, and Mandi Sabean religions." This has three problems. First, it excludes some religious groups, such as Baha'is and Jews. Second, it is not clear what "freedom of belief and religious practice" actually protects. It might mean only freedom to hold your beliefs and to have private worship services – a far cry from full religious freedom. Every religion calls for far more than beliefs and liturgy, including freely living out its beliefs in the society at large.

The meaning of the unusual and worrying provision guaranteeing "the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people" is not at all clear. It is a vague constitutional mandate of potentially unlimited scope.

Another concern is Article 39, dealing with personal status – marriage, custody, alimony, and inheri-tance: "Iraqis are free in the adherence to their personal status according to their own religion, sect, belief, and choice, and that will be organized by law." Most discussion of this has focused on its potential to undercut women's rights, but its effects can be far wider: People could be forced into a legal status dictated by a religious group whether they wanted to or not, and their individual religious freedom could be undercut, especially since many interpretations of Shari'ah give one set of rights for Muslim men, another for Muslim women, and quite another for non-Muslims. These provisions can further reinforce the second-class status of Iraq's already beleaguered Christian community, now roughly 3 percent of the population and rapidly shrinking.

This contradictory draft constitution provokes many cans, coulds, and other concerns. Its clauses might be used either to bolster or to limit religious freedom. Since the Iraqis are continually adapting the document, the United States should discreetly push particularly for changes in Article 39 and the "Islamic identity" provisions in Article 2. If the constitution is accepted in the October referendum, the other worrying clauses could become much less worrisome in the hands of capable judges who reinforce the document's human-rights guarantees. In this, as in so much else, the major effect of the constitution is going to depend on the quality of the government that enforces it.

Paul Marshall is senior fellow at Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom in Washington, D.C., and editor of the new volume Radical Islam's Rules: The Worldwide Spread of Extreme Shari'ah Law *(Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).*

This article appeared earlier on the Christianity Today website: http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/135/23.0.html It is reprinted here by permission of the author.

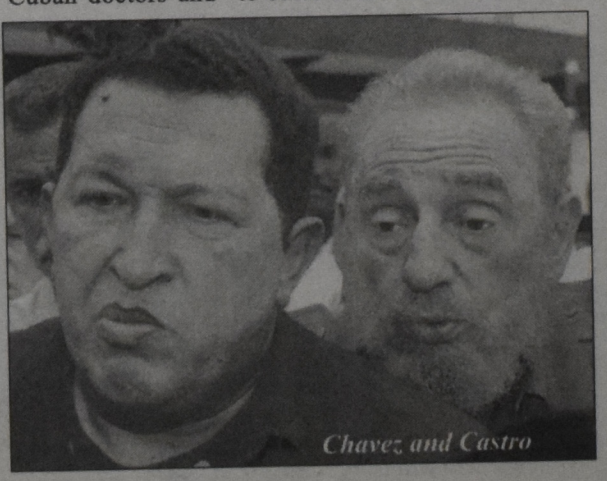
Chavez... *continued from p.1*

established very close ties with Castro, visited Muammar Gaddafi, Vladimir Putin and Tehran (cheering their nuclear amibition) and thumbed his nose at the U.S. at every opportunity. And he has a lot of opportunities, for he often takes advantage of his power to co-opt television time for his hour-long diatribes, during which he calls Bush names and has made off-color jokes about Condoleeza Rice.

"The grand destroyer of the world, and the greatest threat," he declared, "is represented by U.S. imperialism." Another much quoted statement: "Capitalism is leading us straight to hell."

But most of the poor of Venezuela – and there are a great many of them – look up to him as a hero. Unlike his corrupt predecessors, he has used the oil wealth of his country to make a difference in the life of the poorest of his people. It has not happened without a lot of turmoil, however. Since his election in 1998, he has survived four general strikes, a military coup and a recall referendum. A couple of years ago, polls said that 70 percent of his people were deeply dissatisfied with the way he was running the country.

At times the country was crippled by mass protests and strikes against his often inept regime. But he has successfully consolidated his power and his critics are increasingly falling silent, afraid to oppose him. Leftists and even church leaders have praised some of his projects. He has used Venezuelan oil revenue to build health clinics, to subsidize food stores and establish small-scale manufacturing in poor areas (using a rather capitalist model). He has made an arrangement with Castro to provide cheap oil to Cuba in exchange for over 17,000 Cuban doctors and teachers to serve the Venezuelan poor.



Chavez and Castro

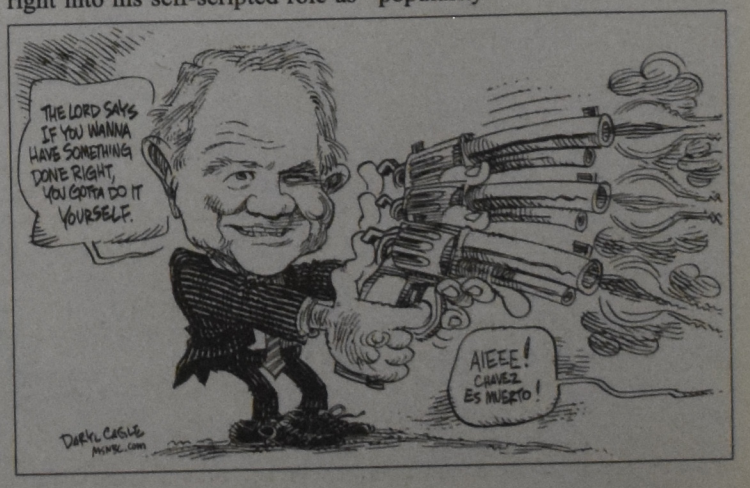
His policies to help the poor, however, have come at the cost of democratic liberties. His governing style has become increasingly autocratic, despite his promises to reform after the failed coup. Many of the programs that he has instituted are manned by his cronies and so-called Chavistas. Some say that a parallel system of institution is evolving which is run by people personally loyal to him. They claim that the government is blacklisting those who have opposed him.The food chain Mercal that he has created sells food at subsidized prices, so it has rapidly been putting other stores out of business. Like Mugabe in Zimbabwe, he has armed supporters who stand ready to come to his defense in case of another coup attempt, so he commands a popular force alongside the regular forces. Recently he has ordered 100,000 assault rifles from the USSR.

Chavez has recently set aside several millions of oil dollars to create a Latin American television network equivalent to CNN, a good idea, except that his critics fear that he will use it to disseminate more of the extreme left-wing propaganda that has served to polarize his own country.

All this has the U.S. worried. But U.S. leaders have been playing him low key. Pat Robertson played right into his self-scripted role as the noble Robin Hood standing up to the evil sheriff and his henchmen in Washington, D.C.

Robertson's comments have also done little to raise respect for the evangelical right – and he has been chastized by every evangelical leader with computer and access to e-mail. The only one to defend him was Pat himself, and he said, in effect, it only sounded as if I said that: I didn't really mean it.

Pat would be well-advised not to vacation in Latin America. Even the evangelical missionaries down there wouldn't welcome him. He has not heightened their popularity.



Politics

Softwood lumber: Score: Canada 1; the U.S. 1

Harry der Nederlanden

The softwood lumber issue has moved Canadians from celebration to frustration to anger to ... befuddlement. Less than three weeks after NAFTA ruled in favor of Canada, the World Trade Organization ruled in favor to the U.S.

After celebrating the NAFTA ruling – the third of such rulings – that Canada's way of managing its forestry industry does not constitute dumping and therefore ought not to be subject to penalties, Canadians waited to see whether the U.S. would comply. Not too many observers were optimistic that the U.S. would return all of the $5 billion in duties collected "illegally" over the past few years. Frustration set in when the U.S. simply shrugged off the NAFTA ruling as if it is free to ignore whatever part of the treaty isn't to its liking.

When the Canadian government indicated it was about to start negotiations all over, Canadians got ticked off. What good is a treaty, they asked, if the U.S. doesn't abide by its provisions? They demanded a bit more backbone from their government. And the government summoned some – as much as it dared. It talked about slapping duties on American wine – starting in 2007 or so. This sounded a bit weak, so it began talking about targeting American corn, since the U.S. subsidizes corn growers.

"The American position is absolutely untenable," declared P.M. Paul Martin. "It's unacceptable. When a panel comes down and makes a decision, that should be honored."

And Industry Minister David Emerson used the word "retaliation."

Pettigrew growled that he was fed up with the U.S. ignoring years of World Trade Organization (WTO) and NAFTA rulings in Canada's favor on the softwood issue.

Trade Minister Jim Peterson, however, urged caution. He said that he would not move until the WTO gave Canada its blessing, which was not expected until mid-2006.

To underline Canada's displeasure, Peterson cancelled talks slated for late August in Ottawa. And the government joined the Canadian softwood lumber industry to file a lawsuit in New York with the U.S. International Trade Court to recoup the"tens of millions of dollars" in import duties collected by the U.S. Such litigation would take years.

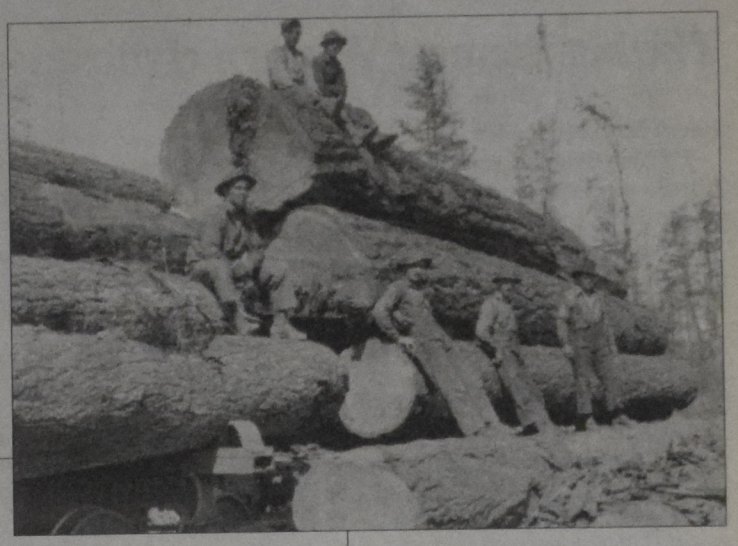
NDP leader Jack Layton demanded that the Prime Minister immediately recall Parliament to debate the softwood issue and how to retaliate.

The WTO acted more quickly than anyone had figured on – and it took the wind out of Canada's sails by issuing a preliminary judgment that Canada had dumped and subsidized its softwood exports and that the U.S. was justified in its actions. Although the decision is not final, interim rulings are rarely changed, according to a *Globe and Mail* article. The WTO ruling does not override the NAFTA ruling, says the same article. What body decides whose ruling carries most weight, one wonders. What laws and rules will apply when the case comes before the courts?

Neena Moorjani, a spokeswoman for the United States trade representative's office, said that "back-and-forth litigation won't solve this 20-year-old issue. The best course of action is to come to a negotiated solution, and we look forward to the resumption of talks as soon as possible."

I think that's what Canada said several years ago when the U.S. lumber industry began its litigations against Canada.

A U.S. politician suggested that in view of the damage done by the hurricane, perhaps duties ought to be lifted on Canadian lumber to help in reconstruction. A spokesman for the U.S. lumber lobby agreed that Canadian producers should be exempted from those punitive softwood duties – but only on free lumber donated to the rebuilding effort in Louisiana and Mississippi.



"If Canada wants to do the humanitarian aid and donate their lumber, there would be no duty on free lumber," said Scott Shotwell, a spokesman for the Coalition for Fair Lumber Imports.

Does Shotwell really think that other countries impose duties on humanitarian aid donated free of charge?

Justice Indonesian style

John M. Lindner

JAKARTA (ANS) – The three women charged with violating Indonesia's 2002 Child Protection Act by Christianizing Muslim children were found guilty September 1 of all charges in an Indonesian court charged with anti-Christian radicals.

Jeff Hammond, director of Bless Indonesia Today, told ANS that Dr. Rebecca Laonita, Mrs. Ratna Mala Bangun, and Mrs. Ety Pangesti, who conducted a "Happy Week" (or "Happy Sunday") program in their homes in early May, were found "guilty of all charges" and given a sentence of three years.

Hammond pointed out that the guilty verdict was pronounced, even though the children had their parents' permission to attend, and none of them had changed their religion.

He said the verdict may actually have spared the three a worse fate, as the witnesses and judges were "constantly under the threats of violence from hundreds of Islamic radicals, who threatened to kill the three ladies, witnesses, pastors, missionaries – and even the judges – if the women were acquitted."

Hammond told ANS that anti-Christian radicals arrived in nine trucks and "brought a coffin to bury the accused if they were found not guilty. Their violent threats continued in their speeches before the session began."

When the verdict was read, the crowd erupted with "Allahu akbar" ("God is greater").

"Please pray for these three beautiful, gentle women, who were just trying to help save the children of prostitutes from going down the same pathway," Hammond requested.

He said the verdict will undoubtedly be appealed. However, whether true justice can ever be obtained under the intimidation of such anti-Christian radical remains to be seen.

Paul Marshall, a senior fellow at Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom, said the case could establish a dangerous precedent. "It's especially troubling and worrisome since it occurred in Indonesia, a country long known for its relative religious freedom," Marshall said. "If it signifies the future direction of the country, the consequences will be terrible."

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Editorial

The big themes: Western civilization, Christian education and ... (ahem) *Christian Courier*

Harry der Nederlanden

For this issue I planned to muse on some big themes. It's the month in which we officially mark our 60th anniversary; it's the beginning of the school year; it's the 100th anniversary of Alberta and Saskatchewan; there are big things happening in the Middle East that force us to think about the nature of democracy and of the nature of civilization itself. And then hurricane Katrina hit and set our heads spinning.

I planned to pick up on some of the history of our own community as it became part of Canadian society. My decade-by-decade reading of back issues – 1955, 65, 75, etc – was supposed to yield some insights. I got a pretty good start in this issue, but by the time I reached 1975 the designated pages were full and the insights were not swift in coming.

Going through back issues is very time-consuming work. I even spent most of one Saturday among smelly stacks of old *CC*s. After spending a few hours turning pages – carefully so they don't crumble – I realized I wasn't really getting much work done.

You become absorbed in story after story. Finding part three of an interesting story in one September issue (the month I targeted), you look for part one. In that issue an interesting discussion catches your eye on the letters page, but those letters were in response to something written three weeks earlier (snail-mail, remember), and before you know it, instead of being in September of 1965, you're holding the Christmas issue of 1964.

I guess that's why we always end up talking about beginnings, origins. Life flows on. It is all one continuum, an endless river. And then suddenly you notice that things have changed. The continuum has been broken somewhere, and no one seemed to notice at the time.

There are sea changes, shifts in direction, transforming events, periods. Sometimes we only detect the breaks when we look back (and disagree vehemently about when they happened). But sometimes events hit us like ... well, like a tsunami.

Aren't a lot of the big events side-effects of our well-intentioned efforts to make life better, to improve our civilization? Nearly every cultural enterprise powered by idealism and optimism seems to have its unintended consequences, often negative. While we have our eyes fixed on new horizons, something sneaks up on us from the rear and delivers a swift kick to that part of our body that always drags a bit behind. It's always the posterior that feels it first, whether in the actual body or in the body politic. Often the head remains in the clouds a little while longer.

A few weeks ago the people of New Orleans and Biloxi were folks like us – going about their daily lives, raising families, going to work to make ends meet, hoping for a few extras, grateful for the small joys that make life worth living. Some even went to church now and again. Most undoubtedly felt their lives were just ordinary, humdrum – not particularly remarkable or exciting, perhaps even colorless and dreary, defined too much in terms of basic routines.

And then one day at the end of August all those ordinary things, all those routines that, in the words of the Preacher, had come to seem so empty and wearisome, were swept away. Those people found themselves in the midst of ruins and stinking flood waters, among frightened, desperate neighbors, thirsty, hungry, wondering, "What's happening to us? What will happen to me?" Their past swept away, their future seemingly gone, only room in the mind for the desperate now.

Only last week I was reading a collection of essays on Rousseau, the French philosopher famous for describing civilization largely in negative terms. A lot of us have become Rousseaus lately, seeing civilization, especially Western civ, largely in terms of domination, expropriation, exploitation, environmental degradation, and so on. But when we are deprived of the externals of civilization, we don't fare too well. We need them badly (and I'm not just talking about the poor who got trapped in New Orleans). Most people behaved well. Civilization, we like to think, is mostly a matter of inner discipline and personal behavior. But it is also startlingly dependent on external things – a room, a bed, a toilet, access to clean drinking water, useable streets, lights. These are basic necessities and without them we do not do very well, no matter how civilized we may fancy ourselves.

Why all this rumination about civilization? It has become a hot topic again after disappearing for some time. Samuel Huntington wrote a much-discussed book about the clash of civilizations, spurred by the challenge of Islam and radical Islamism. (Some suggest that the latter is actually a virulent blend of Islamic and Western ideas.) On my desk I have John Ralston Saul's *The Unconscious Civilization* and Thomas Cahill's *How the Irish Saved Civilization*. Looking through my library a few months ago, I noticed that right after the Second World War a whole raft of books were published with the word "civilization" in the title, among them works by prominent theologians like John Baillie and Emile Brunner. Albert Schweitzer got in on the act with a two-volume work.

Some time ago I also mentioned a book by the well-known German theologian Helmut Thielicke which is a collection of lectures he gave on Western culture when allied bombs were raining down on his people. Once he had to change location because the church in which he'd been giving them was damaged. Even in the midst of turmoil and ruin, Thielicke considered it important to reflect on those big themes. (His lectures remind me of the sorts of things discussed at the Unionville conferences in the early 60s.) In one of his books the Spanish writer Jorge Semprun relates that a few days after his release from Buchenwald, he is passionately discussing big philosophical themes relating to the future of Europe.

We've backed off from such ambitious thinking the last few decades. Perhaps rightly so. There's always a certain pretentiousness to such discussions – as if we were mighty chess masters moving our pieces across the face of the globe at will. But we cannot avoid those big questions for long, whether because of global pollution, the clash of civilizations, the migration of peoples or crowded prisons and failing welfare in the inner cities. All issues nowadays inevitably become global issues.

In the discussions in these pages of the relation between Islam and radical Islam, Islam and the West, third world poverty and the West, global warming, etc., we sometimes exhibit an anxiety to preserve and protect "our" civilization. Yet, at other times we arraign "our" civilization for its consumerism (materialism), environmental destruction and disregard for the needs of the impoverished South. Today's post-modernists often characterize almost every aspect of that jumbo jetliner called Western civ as destructive to our humanity (if they can still speak of "humanity").

But as I was browsing through the back issues of *CC*, I was reminded that much of what we "Calvinists" were saying at our conferences in the 60s and 70s was a fundamental critique of Western civ. Inspired by men like Dooyeweerd, Runner and other troopers, we saw this as contested terrain and we were arming ourselves – with ideas. At that time we were sure that the Holy Spirit had a Phd., perhaps not in theology, but certainly in philosophy.

If we're going to be defending Western civ nowadays, it's quite clear from our tradition that we don't want to be seduced into defending the whole shebang. Much of it should be swept away, or perhaps ground up and baked into new bricks for new cities. But there are certainly things worth fighting for – just as Christian soldiers in the Second World War died fighting for democracy, however uncertain its pedigree. (My high school history teacher gave Christianity – the Medieval church – no credit for democracy whatsoever. It was wholly Greek to her.)

As I was preparing to write on the interface between the big themes of civilization, the project of Christian higher education, the history of our Christian community as reflected in *CC* and the task of *CC*, I picked up a book my son was taking with him to college. My youngest son and daughter are both studying abroad this year in Calvin's semester abroad program – one in Hungary and one in China. The book was *Café Europa*. In the first essay the writer, Slavenka Drakulic, a Hungarian woman, describes how difficult it was during the communist years to write and to think "I", that is to risk thinking for oneself. She says in a popular way what the Czechoslovakian writer Vaclav Havel and the Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz testified to in even greater depth. Our culture, our civilization, impacts very deeply not just how we think about the most basic things, like identity, but also how we are able to feel, to experience, even to dream.

That was true behind the former Iron Curtain. But it is also true here in the West. To understand and to imagine our task and calling in the kingdom of heaven is a constant struggle. We draw from our traditions and our civilization, but we must also free ourselves of them. And we need to be prodded and encouraged by one another in that struggle. In that task we need not just schools and churches but also publications like *CC*. And we need the graduates of our institutions of higher learning to give us the benefits of their learning in these pages. After 60 years the task is far from finished.

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EDITORIAL TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF
Editor: Harry der Nederlanden editor@christiancourier.ca
Circulation: Rose der Nederlanden rose@christiancourier.ca
Accounts/Advertising Manager: Ineke Medcalf-Strayer
ads@christiancourier.ca

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Sixty years of CC: From mimeographed page to computer age

CC has traditionally celebrated its anniversaries in September, although the first issue of the *Canadian Calvinist*, our western root, was published with a date of August. The eastern root, *Contact*, was not begun until 1949, also in August. I suppose that former editors assumed that the mail was slower in those days and most readers wouldn't have received a copy until September.

Actually, *CC* did not begin marking anniversaries in a big way until it reached its 40th milestone. To mark the occasion of CC's 20th anniversary, however, it did publish the first issue of *Canadian Calvinist* in its entirety. It was, after all, only a single mimeographed page.

Most anniversaries passed by largely unnoticed. Bert Witvoet and staff put a lot of work into the 40th anniversary issue. It contains greetings from over 100 businesses, organizations and institutions, many of them one-quarter page ads. If all the greeters paid for the space – and I suspect they did, for by this time Stan De Jong was the manager – then it was not only a fat issue (36 pages) but a profitable one.

Were I a good manager like Stan, I'd cobble together a special anniversary issue too – just to collect the money for the ads. We can always use more money. But contacting all those agencies and businesses to invite them to congratulate us is a lot of work. (And a bit self-serving.) Forty years ago the staff at *CC* was considerably bigger. Of course, at the time it was part of Keith Knight Publishing, which also took in other jobs besides publishing *CC*.

Before 1985 the paper was composed on typesetting machines that required highly skilled operators. In the spring of that year *CC* acquired a computer that greatly simplified the task of typesetting – and another one that greatly simplified the task of mailing. By the time I came aboard 14 years later, that machine was already obsolete, still sitting on a desk, but unused and gathering dust. By then every employee had a desktop computer and getting the stories into print required nothing more than typing skills.

The copy was still first printed up and then pasted onto two-page "flats" (with beeswax), which were then sent by bus to Oxford Press in Woodstock. Under Marian's editorship *CC* tried hard to make the transition to an entirely electronic copy that could be sent to the printer over the internet. We spent a few very late nights and weekends sending and resending our electronic copy. It took a couple of hours, and if the connection was interrupted, as it often was, the process had to be started from scratch. Even after Oxford Press received our files, they were often corrupted en route, and we'd have to try, try again. After a few such episodes, we reverted to the old process. Not entirely, though. We didn't want to lose everything we had learned with much sweat and tears.

Only after Alan Doerksen left us a couple of years ago did we do away with the old technology altogether and go completely electronic. The technology we now use takes a great deal less office space and fewer staff. With e-mail connections, a story don't take days to reach us, but pops up almost instantaneously from the writer's computer to ours. And when we send the finished version to Woodstock, with a high-speed connection, the entire issue arrives there in a few minutes. When Oxford Press has it all ready to go, we can even give it a last minute proofread. It's like stepping across a space of about 150 km to look at the *CC* layout on the computer connected to the big printing press in Woodstock. Several years ago I had to drive a new copy of our latest issue to Woodstock when the original got lost on the bus – a round trip of over 4 hours. Now we're virtually peering over the shoulder of the typesetter – only he's no longer a typesetter but simply someone who knows the publishing software that sends copy to the printing press.

All those changes in technology over the years, however, still serve the same purpose – to put words on a page that enable us to share our thoughts and experiences. In fact, once the shift was made from a few mimeographed pages to a professionally printed publication, the paper really hasn't undergone huge changes in looks. It has never aspired to become a glossy magazine that invests a lot in paper, pictures and design. It has remained very functional, using the cheapest newsprint and the most economical way to put it on the page. For a few years it sported some color every other issue thanks to the generosity of Voortmans, but for most of its existence *CC* has been what it is now – focused on black-and-white text.

Fewer people are avid readers nowadays, at least readers of paper print material. Many still read a lot on the internet (and write replies). And watching television critically is also an act of reading. But magazines like ours have been struggling. Many have disappeared. Even the big names like *Newsweek*, *Time* and *MacLeans* have been losing readers. The latest CRC Synod chose to send *The Banner* to every family in the church largely because not enough church members were subscribing and church leaders rightly judged it important that everyone keep in touch. In the 60s and 70s most people made that decision on their own and paid for it individually.

Since I'm a voracious reader myself, I lament the shift from print culture to a more oral and visual culture. But, I admit, it isn't all bad. If that shift had happened earlier, maybe we wouldn't have had church splits over abstruse theological issues which half the people understood only dimly.

Linear print culture and the modes of thinking linked to it weren't the only factors, let me hasten to add, but I'm sure they played a role. Our forefathers (and a few mothers) squared off on supra and infralapsarianism and on predestination and the well-meant gospel offer, on general revelation and common grace, and so on. *CC* steered clear of such theological debate, appealing to its status: "We are not a church paper." But it gave plenty of room to other debates, about Christian's responsibility in education, labor and politics, for example. But debates about women in office, hermeneutics and worship, especially music, also found their way into its pages.

Compared to church papers from other traditions, *CC* has not been a staid, safe paper, although its editors have sought to be pastoral –peacemakers rather than fomenters of division. Nevertheless, *CC* readers weren't always happy that *CC* opened its pages to certain opinions, and it has had its share of protest cancellations. It's always an iffy thing for an editor: although the paper is committed to the promotion of the Reformed faith, to be informative non-Reformed (or what some consider non-Reformed) ideas need to be aired, and to be fair sometimes it is best to let those who hold those opinions state them. Repression or avoidance is seldom helpful.

But sometimes the editor intervened and called a halt to debate, declaring enough is enough. After a while some debates engender vastly more heat than light and participants look for ways to turn their words into bullets. On that score, a survey of past issues suggests that *CC* has contributed far more to the creation of community and mutual understanding than it has to division and partisanship, and it has not done so by seeking to impose an ideology. That convergence has come from the will of the members of the *CC* community to hold on to one another – and, of course, from a shared love for the Reformed faith and a biblical worldview.

We confess that love and peace are fruits of the Spirit, but the Spirit also engenders a love for truth, for biblical teaching and for the life of obedience. And then even Spirit-driven people can bump heads. That happened too.

Some former readers of *CC* are now reading *Christian Renewal*, which serves those who broke away from the CRC. Years ago, when it was based in Sioux Center, Iowa, and I was living in Grand Rapids, I even contributed to that magazine. On this, our 60th anniversary, I send greetings to those former readers too: they are still our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Some of the writers in *Christian Renewal* once wrote for *CC*.

We also thank our faithful readers, some of whom have been subscribers almost from the beginning. Some are now complaining that our print is too small, but actually it's a bit bigger than it used to be. Above all, we thank our faithful Father, Lord and Savior, for giving us something good to do as we look forward to his return.

For all its shortcomings and faults, *CC* has been a good work, and we thank Keith Knight, Bert Witvoet, Marian van Til, and many, many more people who worked hard to realize something of a vision of Christian journalism in the Reformed tradition. It wasn't perfect, but God is an editor too – and he will one day perfect it.

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60 years decade by decade

Harry der Nederlanden

On these 60th Anniversary pages I have been picking interesting bits of news from past issues more or less arbitrarily to recall some of the events and concerns that the paper has featured over its lifespan. They reflect both the times, the mind and the struggles of the Dutch Reformed community in Canada. In this special issue, we will take snapshots of what *CC* was focused on during September on every ten-year anniversary of the paper. Sorry the pictures are so blurry, but scanning pictures from fuzzy originals does nothing to improve their quality.

The Canadian Calvinist was launched in August of 1945 primarily to promote, as the name suggests, a Calvinist "world and life view" in Canada. At its founding it was clearly serving a community already more at home in this country than the community addressed by *Contact*, begun in Ontario four years later. Contact was created by the CRC Immigration Committee to provide information for new immigrants from The Netherlands.

While Rev. DeKoekkoek, editor of the *Canadian Calvinist*, campaigned for Christian schools and involvement in the political and cultural life of Canada, at first *Contact* carried many stories that gave impressions of immigrant life in different parts of Canada as well as commenting on the behavior and customs of "Canadians". Discussions of weather and soil, as well as the price of land, appear in almost every issue, and there are lots of "farm for sale" ads. But news about the "home country" is also important.

Christian school teachers in Canada were encouraged to take a two-week summer session in Hamilton to deepen their Reformed worldview. Pictured are six teacher teachers: Dr. R. Kooistra, Dr. Evan Runner, Arnold Snoeyink, Rita van Westenbrugge, Herman de Jong, Dr. Paul Schrotenboer. The courses were sponsored by the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies and the Canadian Christian Teachers Association. By the time of the final banquet, Herman de Jong had turned the 62 teachers into a surprisingly good choir. In 1955, it seems, they were still singing in harmony.

The fifties: building institutions

Going back 50 years to Septem-ber 1955, *CC*'s front page features quite a number of articles on the Cold War, the threat of the USSR and China, and the issue of nuclear weapons. Large diagrams map out the Distant Early Warning Line and other radar posts, sketching the path that ballistic missiles aimed at American cities by the USSR would follow – over the North Pole and across Canadian skies.

"Eisenhower says: No peace without justice" declares the headline for Sept. 9, 1955. At the meeting of the Big Four (the US, UK, USSR and France), Eisenhower pledged to remember the plight of the satellite states under communist rule. In 1955 the Allies ended their occupation of West Germany and the latter became a member of NATO.

In a series of articles begun in August, Jacob Uitvlugt stresses the sacrifices parents are called to make to create Christian schools. He underlines the antithesis, but he explains that the antithesis does not just put us in conflict with external opponents, but also with those among us who should be supporting us – and with our own materialism and worldliness.

"We have strayed so far," says Uitvlugt, "that it looks as if we have forgotten our origins. In our daily life, there is almost no discernible difference between those who serve God and those who don't. We must spend less time and effort pointing out the superficiality and ungodliness of those around us and more examining ourselves – how it is with us and what direction we are going."

He continues his theme in the following issue, reminding *CC* readers that Jesus said that he who is not for me is against me. "So there is no neutrality," he writes. He compares the public schools to a farmer who instead of sowing his field with wheat sows his field with nothing but weeds. The public schools, he warns, sow seeds that teaches the "innate goodness of man" and evolution.

Parents are reminded of the pledge they made when they baptized their children. "God has placed our children in his covenant," he says, "and they are born into the church, shall we then give them to the world to educate?"

But *CC* wasn't all high serious-ness in 1955. It also tells the story of a Texas farmer who is the first to harness atomic energy for peaceful purposes. The uranium under his property produced a certain level of radiation. Believing the folktale that radiation helps alleviate the pain and discomfort of rheumatism, an old man asked the farmer for permission to sit in his field for a while to soak up its healing powers.

He told everyone that it made him feel much better. Word got around, and soon the farmer was swamped with elderly folk wanting to sit in his field. He began charging them one dollar per hour, at first just to discourage them. But soon he was making more money from senior sitters than from his cows. After a while instead of a field with grazing cows he had a field full of lazing seniors.

There must be a moral to the story, but one was not provided.

Snijbonen

In the ad section of the Sept. 9, 1955 issue, Vander Veen's Impor-ting offers to send 5 lbs of coffee to friend in the old country for a mere $6.00, and offers snijboonmolens for $3.25.

When I was a kid, I spent hours cranking the long flat beans through the slicer. I hated it when the beans were curled and wouldn't go in of their own accord. "Watch your fingers!" Mom would holler, and every so often the cutter would come loose from the table and clatter to the floor. "Potverdikee! Domoor!" my sister would shout, as if it were my fault the thing kept coming loose. I admit, though, that it was fun to crank as fast as you could because then the bean slices would go shooting high in the air.

I noticed that couple of my 8-year-old Canadian friends were fascinated by the gizmo. They had never seen one before. I hadn't yet read Tom Sawyer, but soon I had them begging me for a turn at cranking beans through our snijboonmolentje.

A farm of 100 acres near Aylmer was for sale for $11,500, and good market gardening land in Holland Marsh was advertised for $100 per acre. For a mere dollar Maxwell Electronics in Toronto would record an audio letter to send to family back home in Holland.

The Christian Reformed Co-op Medical and Hospital Society offered hospitalization coverage for $15 every quarter year for the entire family, including children up to 18 years of age.

Hudson's Bay would deliver a sofa to your door for $119.88.

Another anniversary

An esoteric item caught my eye, perhaps because my youngest son is in Budapest right now. The Reformed Theological Academy in Budapest, Hungary celebrated its 100th anniversary by awarding an honorary doctorate to Rev. Martin Niemoeller for his resistance to the Nazis. That means the institution is 150 years old this month. Con-gratulations! An internet search reveals that it has undergone a name change: today it is called the Gaspar Karoli Reformed University. Karoli translated the Bible into Hungarian in 1590, which did similar things for the Hungarian language as the King James did for English.

One wonders, was the honor accorded to Niemoeller in 1955 (a year before the

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aborted Hungarian Revolution) a subtle act of protest against the communist regime?

A short news item reported that school didn't open in September 1955 for many children in Massachusetts. The number of cases of polio among children had skyrocketed. If I remember correctly, schools in Beverly didn't open on time that year either. I visited a schoolmate who was laid up with polio. His legs covered with a plaid blanket, he looked wan and pale. We felt very sorry for him and brought him some comic books to read.

Next time I saw him, however, he was sprinting down the back alley behind the drugstore as if the devil were after him. The devil turned out to be police chief Macklehardy. Our chubby chief didn't have a ghost of a chance of catching him. My schoolmate looked fully recovered.

About a year later, he and a couple of buddies attempted to steal the magazines I was selling door to door, and I had to threaten to punch him in the nose to get them back. That was right in front of the old movie theater on 118th avenue and 45th street, where we once held church services.

The sixties: conferences, *congresses, principles and ideas*

Now we jump a decade to September of 1965. On the front page of the Sept. 3, 1965 issue, Paul Tamelink pulled no punches as he addressed the role of the church in contemporary society. He describes Calvinist churches as caught in a crossfire. According to the liberals and neo-orthodox, he says, we are too strict (zwaar) and conservative, while according to the fundamentalists we're too lax (licht) and progressive. So we're caught in the middle.

He takes on an article in *Missionary Monthly* by the well-known Reformed preacher Jerome de Jong that criticized the churches for their involvement in civil rights. The task of the church is not political, economic or social, declared De Jong. Although he's in favor of racial equality, he suggests that instead of marching in Selma, Christians should be "in their inner closet" praying for a solution.

Tameling is all in favor of prayer, but to do nothing but pray, he argues, is a form of escapism. Prayer and evangelism do not exhaust the work of the church, for it must preach justice as well as the atonement. While he rejects the social gospel, Tameling also rejects the down-sized gospel of fundamentalism.

Readers of the September 1965 issues of *CC* were treated to some deep thinking. Rev. L. Praamsma provided a survey of recent developments in biblical criticism among Roman Catholic scholars. He notes a new emphasis on Scripture in Catholic periodicals in America. However, they adopt all the tools of biblical higher criticism, dismissing the book of Jonah, for example, as fiction, because "to convert an entire population so quickly is impossible." The historical books of the Old testament may employ a historical form, these scholars argue, but they are not genuine history. So in 1965 Praamsma saw the Roman Catholic Church tilting dangerously to the left.

German higher critics

In the same issue, Sidney Greidanus, a theology student at the time, was just ending a three-part report about his participation in the huge *Kirchentag* held in Germany. This is included in the "*Christian Courier*" section of the paper, an all-English inserted launched in 1962.

The Protestant churches in Germany first began holding an annual "church day" in 1848, and after the end of World War II the tradition was continued. Except for a few elderly people, Christians from east Germany were not permitted to participate in 1965. The theme of the six-day congress was "Standing on liberty" and it was attended by 13,000 people, about 1,500 of whom came from other countries.

Greidanus tells *CC* readers that he tried to soak up as much as possible, but there was so much going on that it made his head throb. Yes, theology has often given Christians headaches. He mused that perhaps speakers had been selected more for their fame than for their orthodoxy, because the higher criticism was very much in evidence.

One of the speakers, for example, examined the New Testament story of the miraculous catch of fish. He concluded that the story was an invention of the early church and had no basis in fact. It was not history, but a parable about catching people.

"Are such men insincere?" asks Greidanus. He thinks not. Many of them, he suggests, are wrestling with God's Word to communicate its meaning to modern listeners. Perhaps some of them are more sincere than those who simply repeat the formulations of a bygone time, muses Greidanus. There is much to be learned from these scholars, he says: we must not just clap our hands over our ears. However, he laments that no one even mentioned the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture.

He concludes: "When modern man takes offense at the miracles recorded in Scripture, he takes offense not at some inconsequential details that must be cleared away before he can meet the real offense – Christ; rather, he takes offense at the heart of the matter, namely the God who can work miracles and who has worked the greatest miracle of all and revealed himself in Christ Jesus."

Greidanus worried that higher criticism imposes a new hierarchy between Scripture and the laity: instead of a priesthood, theological scholars. Before the ordinary believer can know what Scripture is saying, he must first consult the Higher Critic to learn whether the text is reliable.

Continued on p. 8...

Ninety candles for Neerlandia

As I flipped through the back issues of 1965, I came upon an article I couldn't pass up, even though it was in the August issue. Tini van Ameyde devoted a full page to Neerlandia titled (in Dutch) "Fifty candles for Neerlandia." That's right: August 1965 was the 50th anniversary of the Neerlandia CRC, and that means last month it celebrated its 90th anniversary. Congratulations!

The article is accompanied by several photographs, one of which shows the third church under construction. That's a bit puzzling, for I believe it was built at least a decade earlier. Maybe the editor fished an old photo out of his files; CC editors have been known to do that. There's also a picture that I recognize – the front of the Co-op store. It was the Eaton's Centre of Neerlandia when we arrived there in the spring of 1951 in a truck that slewed from one side of the muddy road to the other as it carried us from the railroad station (actually, there was no station to speak of) to the house of our sponsor, Mr. L. Vander Meulen. He was the principal of the public school in Neerlandia, a public school run by Christians and staffed with Christian teachers.

According to the big book, *A Furrow Laid Bare*, published by the Neerlandia Historical Society, the third church was already there, as the white church with its twin towers had burnt to the ground a couple of years earlier. The book also says that the church had no pastor in 1951, but I recall a young pastor who had a unique talent: he could deliver a two hour sermon in 20 minutes. As a 6-year-old, I was very impressed by his rate of delivery. He sounded like an auctioneer.

Tini van Ameyde, who was a member of "my" church in Beverly, described Neerlandia CRC as the northernmost of all CRCs. That's no longer true, for we have several congregations in Alaska. She denies as false the rumor that in the first church constructed by the Neerlandians the pastor had to take an umbrella with him when he mounted the pulpit on rainy days. The roof of the log church was perfectly fine.

Neerlandia's first preacher, Harm van der Woude, caught the pioneer spirit and worked his own land on the side. The article does not tells us whether his seed produced 40-fold, 60-fold or 100-fold.

Tini relates some humorous stories from the early days. One church member raised objections to a sermon in which the preacher called Jacob a deceiver. He insisted that this was no way to talk about our respected patriarchs.

Another story concerned the building of the second Neerlandia church. Everyone pitched in to help. One relative newcomer had a block and tackle that was needed at the worksite. Draping it over his shoulders, he discovered it was quite heavy, so he decided to take a short cut through the woods. After walking much longer than he should have, he concluded that he was lost. But back home in Holland he had learned survival skills: when lost, don't panic, don't race on ahead, stay where you are.

So he sat down on a log, took out his pipe and thought things over. Then he heard a dog barking. Turned out it was his own dog welcoming him home. He had made a huge circle. Refutes the saying that you can't go home again.

Although Tini focuses on the positives of God's blessings on the Neerlandia community, she talks about troubles as well. The post-war years were a time when the men especially were faithful readers of the Dutch papers that came from overseas, such as *De Heraut* and *De Reformatie*. As a result, they felt themselves much closer to theological developments in the Netherlands than in North America. When the church split in the Netherlands over the teachings of Klaas Schilder, the issues split the Neerlandia church as well, causing deep hurt and bitter feelings that lingered for years afterward.

Downtown Neerlandia in 1951 from A Furrow Laid Bare

Anniversary

Looking ahead – the challenge for Calvinism in Canada

Bernard Zylstra

When Bernie Zylstra wrote this 20 years ago, he was battling the cancer that soon took his life. Yet, he took the time to write this ringing challenge. I thought it worth reprinting.

Let's take a look at the 40 years that lie ahead. Will there be a meaningful role for *Calvinist Contact*? Will there be room for Calvinists in Canada? There will be, if they display an intense spiritual resilience in maintaining their identity in a distinctly challenging and even threatening cultural climate. This becomes clear when we compare the key marks of Calvinism with the key features of modern society and culture. The spirituality of Calvinism displays many characteristics among which the following stand out:

• **The glory of God.**
Perhaps the most fundamental starting point of Calvinism is to be found in the biblical theme of the glory of God as summarized by Paul, "For from him and through him and unto him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen."(Rom. 11:36) Since it proceeds from this theme, Calvinism is distinguished from other forms of Christian spirituality.

• **Creatures are servants.**
Derived from this starting point is its immediate corollary: To be a creature is to be a servant of God. "All things are thy servants." (Ps. 119:19) Calvinism therefore has a very positive view of creation and its history. Creation is the theatre of God's glory. When Satan planned to steal that glory by throwing creation into sin, God sent his Son to redeem creation. Hence redemption is the restoration of creation to serve its Maker.

• **Life is religion.**
In this light the Calvinist holds that human life in its entirety is religion: service of God made possible through the reconciliation of Jesus Christ our Lord in the regeneration of our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Since that service is all encompassing, there is no possibility for religious neutrality in human life, in culture, or in society.

Now compare these marks of Calvinism with the outstanding features of modern society. Here I rely on Os Guinness' remarkably insightful book *The Gravedigger File: Papers on the Subversion of the Modern Church* (Inter-Varsity, 1983). In his view modern society displays these features:

• **Secularization.**
"The process through which, starting from the center and moving outward, successive sectors of society and culture have been freed from the decisive influence of religious ideas and institutions. "(p. 71)

• **Privatization.**
"The process by which modernization produces a cleavage between the public and the private spheres of life and focuses the private sphere as the special arena for the expansion of individual freedom and fulfilment. "(p. 74) Religion is then strictly limited to the private sphere.

• **Pluralization.**
"The process by which the number of options in the private sphere of modern society rapidly multiplies at all levels, especially at the level of world views, faiths and ideologies, "(p. 93)

These features of modern society have contributed to the near-collapse of Christianity in Western Europe, including Calvinism in Holland. In North America, however, an increasing number of Christians are critical of these features. This situation provides an unusual challenge to Calvinism in Canada and the U.S. Because of its spiritual traits outlined above, Calvinism thoroughly rejects the secularization, privatization and pluralization of society. It shares that rejection with the neo-conservative resurgence of fundamentalism in North American Christianity today. However, this resurgence is ''thin on cultural awareness, scholarship and intellectual staying power." (*Time Magazine*, Sept. 2,1985, p. 51)

Unionville Conferences were held at the Cherry Hill Farm

The spiritual reformation which Christianity in Canada sorely needs will require more "gifts of the Spirit" than are normally present in Calvinism. But this reformation does need the gifts of "cultural awareness, scholarship and intellectual staying power." The "Dutch" Reformed community has been endowed with these gifts. During the next 40 years one of the main tasks of *Calvinist Contact* is to contribute to the deepening and broadening of those gifts within its reading constituency. The educational institutions have already been built. Moreover, during the next 40 years, this community itself *should increasingly learn to share* these gifts with the larger Christian world, particularly the evangelical-fundamental communities with which it is spiritually aligned. This is an immense challenge!

Decade by decade ... *continued from p. 7*

ARSS: shaping a Christian mind

The Unionville Conference sponsored by the ARSS received considerable coverage in *CC*, as did its counterparts in B.C. and Alberta. H.Vanderlaan spoke about the physical sciences, Evan Runner about the things he always talked about, and Marten Vrieze on the community idea in Canada. The unnamed reporter devotes quite a bit of space to summarizing Seerveld's meditation on the song of Moses. Among the points highlighted by the reporter: to treat history as mere past events, facts that cannot be altered, is to separate them from contact with the living God. But apart from this contact, history and human life become meaningless. That's why Moses urged the people to "remember the days of old."

In the next issue, Peter Schouls, then a lecturer at the University of Toronto, launched a series called "Of Studies". He argues that for the Christian community to have an impact on contemporary society, we need university trained men and women as leaders. "The world is ruled by ideas," he says, "and certainly not always by the best of them."

He quotes John Dewey, who calls the teacher "the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God." But then he goes on to show what Dewey actually meant by this beautiful phrase. For Dewey the "true kingdom of God" has nothing to do with Scripture, but it is "a man-made kingdom of a man-made God with a man-made truth."

Truly, *CC* did not hesitate to challenge its readers in the mid 60s. But it was a time of ferment that tossed up all sorts of radical ideas and the Reformed community was eager to keep abreast of developments. The paper at this time carried remarkably few news articles on the events of the time. There are pictures of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam and of a ruined neighborhood after the race riots in Watts, but there are no stories to accompany them. The discussion is all about big ideas and ultimate principles.

This photo features some of the leaders of the 1965 Unionville Conference, sponsored by the A.R.S.S. Dr. Peter Schouls, Bert Witvoet, Dr. Evan Runner, Dr. H. vander Laan, Rev. Marten Vrieze.

Europe was experiencing overproduction in pork in 1965, reported *CC*. Too many piggies – salted and canned and no place to go. So Protestant and Catholic churches in Denmark were working together to raise funds so they could ship the surplus to needy countries – the Philippines, Ghana, Jamaica, Korea, Spain and Italy. Spain and Italy?

Over 1300 CRC young people gathered in Niagara Falls, Ontario August 24-26 for the annual Young Calvinist rally. Here, too, the titles of the lectures – "The young Christian faces politics" and "The young Christian and modern art" suggests that they were pretty heady.

Malawians face starvation, church leader says

Toya Richards Hill

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky (PCUSA) – If food isn't sent to the southern African nation of Malawi very soon, many people are sure to die, said the Rev. Winston Kawale, a leader of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP).

"Please, send food to Malawi," Kawale, the general secretary of the CCAP's Nkhoma Synod, said during a visit to the Presbyterian Church (USA) main office on Aug. 22. People already are dying, he said, but hunger will reach a crisis level if food doesn't arrive by November.

Malawi joins the company of Niger and Zambia as countries in need of food aid. The photograph was taken in Niger.

Kawale was the featured speaker at a meeting in Chicago of the Malawi Mission Network, a PC(USA)-related organization for people involved in mission work in Malawi.

During an interview with the Presbyterian News Service, Kawale talked about hunger in his country – which is landlocked and bordered by Zambia, Mozambique and Tanzania – and its need for help from the United States.

Malawi, whose main food crop is maize, has been hit hard by droughts this year. What rain has fallen there has caused flooding, washing away vital crops, according to Kawale, who said: "We need the help as soon as possible."

The food-supply crisis will last "all the months up to next June," when the harvest begins, Kawale said. He predicted devastation like that of three years ago, when millions of Malawians needed humanitarian assistance because of drought and food shortages.

At the height of the late-2002 drought, the PC(USA)'s Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) program fed about 500,000 people a day for a year, according to PDA Coordinator Susan Ryan. Since then, she said, PDA has supported rehabilitation and development in the country.

PDA's work in Malawi, principally in the CCAP's Blantyre and Livingstonia synods, includes crop diversification, irrigation with treadle pumps, and livestock replenishment.

Efforts to teach Malawians to use their own natural resources to keep food on their tables are keys to a long-term solution, Kawale said.

"It's a pity, and I feel ashamed that we have hunger in Malawi," he said. "We have land, we have soil, we have water."

The problem, he said, is a lack of expertise, especially in irrigation and water-resource management, which prevents year-round production. The country has no shortage of water – one of its greatest resources is Lake Malawi, the third-largest body of water in Africa, which covers almost one-fifth of the country.

However, "At the moment, we only depend on the rains," Kawale said. With greater knowledge, he said, "hunger will no longer be there" and "poverty will be addressed."

"Then we can see prosperity," he said.

The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) has long had a relationship with the Christian Reformed Church through membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Council.

India delays hearing on Dalit Christian rights case

Satya Kumar

NEW DELHI (Compass) – Christians throughout India have begun a week of prayer and fasting following a government delay in determining equal rights for Dalit Christians.

Dalit, or "untouchable," is the term given to the lowest of India's caste groupings under the Hindu caste system.

Dalits belonging to the Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh faiths qualify for a government plan that reserves 26 percent of jobs and educational places for them. Under current laws, Dalits who convert to Christianity or Islam lose their reservation privileges.

"A nationwide week of fasting and prayer is being observed in churches and Christian institutions all over the country from August 25 in support of the Dalit cause," John Dayal, the president of the All India Christian Council, told Compass.

The campaign to secure equal rights for Dalit Christians was launched over a year ago in the Supreme Court and at grass-roots levels. It followed successful lobbying by Dalit Sikh and Buddhist communities that forced the government to include them in the rights plan.

The Supreme Court was to hear the matter on August 25. On August 23, the government, represented by Attorney General Milon Banerji, demanded a four-month adjournment. The delay would allow an advisory panel, the Justice Rangnath Mishra National Commission for Linguistic and Religious Minorities, to review the case.

"This came as a surprise to us," Dayal said. "We were very close to concluding the matter favorably.... The government is trying to buy time on the issue. We feel betrayed."

Dayal pointed out that the Justice Rangnath Mishra Commission was set up in October 2004 to investigate economic and social problems in linguistic and religious minority communities.

"Its charter does not include, so far, deciding the constitutional issue of caste among non-Hindu religions," he added.

Chief Justice R. C. Lahoti of the Supreme Court also had expressed anger at the government's move, threatening to "wind up the courts" if such matters were taken out of its jurisdiction.

Lahoti, however, eventually relented and granted the government six weeks to give a status report on the work done by the commission.

The Supreme Court will now hear the case on October 18.

"The court has said that the judicial process can continue alongside the commission's investigation," senior advocate Prashant Bhushan, who is handling the case for Christian petitioners, told Compass. "We don't see it as a total setback – at least we are moving in the right direction."

Dayal and several other Christian leaders presented a memorandum to the commission on August 26, demanding an early decision in favor of Dalit Christians.

In the memo, the leaders asked for the opportunity to make "written, oral and visual presentation, bringing [before the commission] adequate literature and other evidence on the issue."

The Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America (FIACONA), which is dedicated to the safety of all Christians in India, has joined the host of local Indian groups supporting the campaign.

"We are confident that the Indian Supreme Court will draw support from the Constitution of India to award Dalit Christians the rights and protections that are due to them," the Rev. Bernard Malik, FIACONA president, said in a press release on August 25.

Malik also urged the government to avoid prolonging a resolution.

Euthanasia

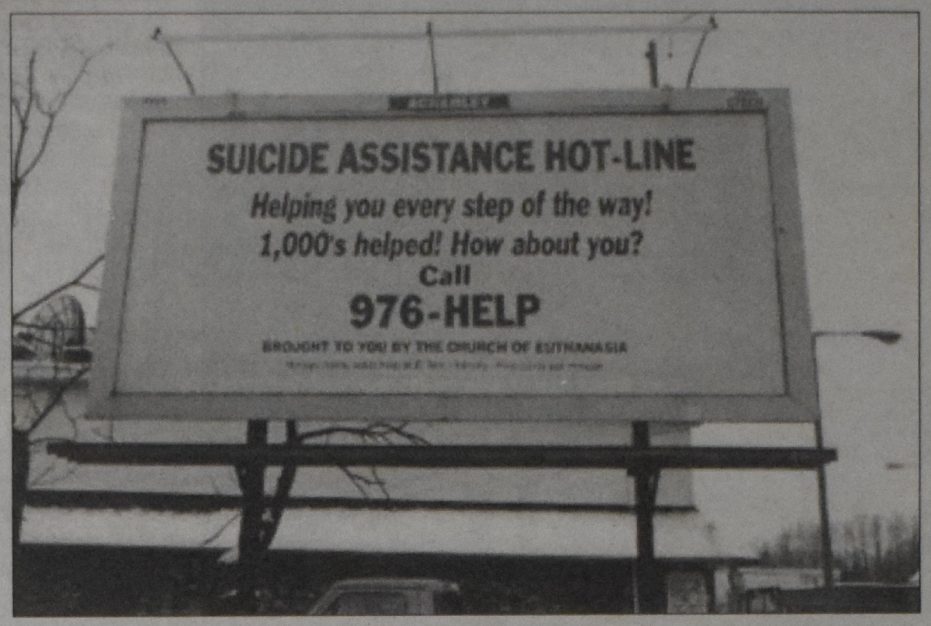
A culture of death?

The case against legalizing euthanasia/assisted suicide

Peter C. Glover

For two millennia the Hippocratic tradition has stood for the 'sanctity' of human life. We can alleviate the unbearable in life better than ever before. We can do that and not eliminate life itself...medicine cannot be both our healer and our killer.

C. Everett Koop,
former Surgeon General of the United States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The courts in the English-speaking world have recently witnessed a number of high-profile and distressing cases where individuals have argued both for the 'right to die' and even the 'right to live' in the event of incapacitation. But it was perhaps in the troubling case of the young American woman Terri Schiavo that the issues surrounding euthanasia have been most hotly debated. A case that, like no other, split the conscience of a nation causing a public debate which cut deep into the American psyche and exposed the core ethical arguments surrounding the whole morality of euthanasia or assisted suicide as never before.

At the heart of the debate was not only the 'human right' to choose death, but the 'right' for society, in general, to be complicit in its acquiescence, hence legally.

Clarifying our terms

Before getting to grips with the issue itself however it is important, if we wish to avoid the confusion that often derails genuine debate, to clarify our terminology.

1. **Suicide** – is self-killing, some, including perhaps the Reformed Christian, would say self-murder.
2. **Assisted suicide** – involves enlisting the aid of another person, often a doctor, to end one's own life. Those 'assisting' provide the means of death but do not take part in the killing directly.
3. **Euthanasia** – is where someone other than the 'patient' – a doctor, nurse or someone else – performs an action, such as a lethal injection, which brings about death.
4. **Passive euthanasia** – is where the withdrawal of medical assistance or life-sustaining treatment leads 'naturally' to the death of the patient. This term is seldom used because of the near universal agreement that it is, and has always been, a justifiable treatment ethically (ie. Allowing 'nature' to take its course).

The heart of the matter

Let me state my case here bluntly: with the exception of No. 4, which has been largely unquestioned common medical practice for centuries, none of the other three (suicide, assisted suicide or euthanasia) have any moral justification in the light of sound reason and/or medical science.

I am opposed to euthanasia in all its forms but not just because I, as a Bible-believing Christian, believe the Creator God is demonstrably opposed to it, making no provision for it in his revealed will to mankind. But also because the biblical teaching, which is not the subject of this particular article, is wholly supported by every ethical, philosophical and reasoned argument it is possible to make.

I mention my biblical worldview here with good reason. All too often, the issue of worldview is obscured in the public debate. Indeed, many Christians even feel it judicious not to mention it at all. As if the assumption is the liberal or secular person, unlike the Christian, does not possess a worldview or cultural or philosophical spectacles through which they view the world. Nothing could be further from the truth! It is just a case of articulating what one's worldview is, and how it affects and underpins the views or opinions being expressed.

This is no secondary matter whenever any moral issue is being discussed. When all is said and done the Judeo-Christian worldview is a well-reasoned pattern of belief in which the sanctity of life is given moral substance. Those who criticize such a worldview ought to be called upon to articulate and uphold their own.

The advantage here is where we, as Bible-believing Christians, can point to a gold standard of moral right or wrong – in fact the moral gold standard which is the foundation of Western civilization's Judeo-Christian heritage. Those who hold secular and liberal privatized worldviews often struggle to sustain it. While the biblical and conservative worldview is focused on the higher good of the community, one usually finds that the secular liberal focuses on the rights of the individual. The reality is however that one must outweigh the other. And the Bible as well as historic tradition dictates that it must be the higher good of the community that wins out.

Having made this important point however, the purpose of this article is rather to equip the Christian with insight into the case against the legalization from a secular perspective to reinforce the biblical argument.

Matters of mind and body

Here, in a nutshell, are the very practical and key arguments against legalizing euthanasia/assisted suicide in any form:

1. A request for assisted suicide is typically a cry for help: In reality it is typically a call for counseling, assistance and positive alternatives as solutions to very real problems.
2. Suicidal intent is typically transient. Of those who attempt suicide, less than 4 percent go on to kill themselves in the next five years; less than 11 percent will commit suicide over the next 35 years.
3. Terminally ill patients who desire death are typically depressed – and depression is treatable. In one study, 24 percent of those desiring death had clinical depression.
4. Pain is controllable. The array of treatments to control pain (palliative care) is vast and impressive today. Often the person seeking death does not need assistance to commit suicide but a doctor better trained in palliative care. The Nightingale Alliance states that 95 percent of all pain is controllable and the other 5 percent can be reduced to a tolerable level.
5. Legalizing voluntary euthanasia almost always means legalizing non-voluntary euthanasia. In America, for instance, State courts have consistently ruled if competent people have a right, then incompetent people must be 'given' the same 'right'. It is highly likely that the British courts would rule the same way.
6. The Netherlands experience in legalizing voluntary assisted suicide for those with terminal illness has spread to include non-voluntary euthanasia for people with no terminal illness. Half of the killings in The Netherlands are now non-voluntary and a 'culture of death', admitted as such privately by many Dutch doctors, has now taken root there. It has become a common legal 'solution' for those with mental illnesses, permanent disability, and even old age.
7. You don't solve problems by getting rid of the people to whom the problems happen. The more difficult but humane solution to human suffering is to address the problem, not get rid of the human.[1]

The Dutch experience

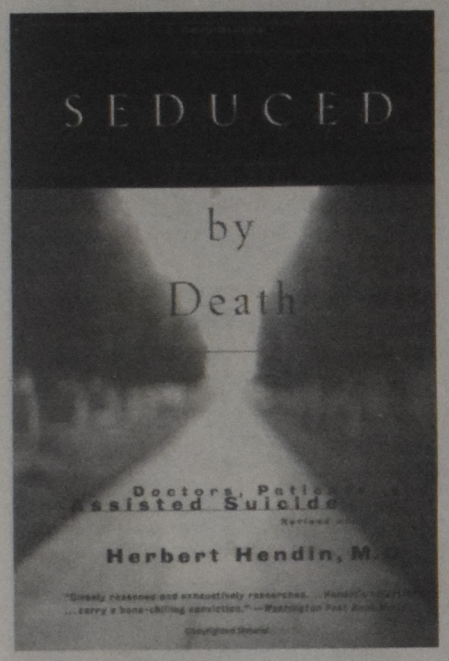
The oft-cited experience of legalized euthanasia in The Netherlands is also worth closer scrutiny than is usually the case. Herbert Hendin, MD, Executive Director of the American Suicide Foundation and Professor of Psychiatry at New York Medical College, has written the following authoritative analysis of euthanasia in The Netherlands in his *Seduced By Death: Doctors, Patients and the Dutch Cure*. Here are some key quotes:

"The doctors who help set Dutch euthanasia policies are aware that euthanasia is basically out of control in The Netherlands. They admitted this to me privately. Yet in their public statements and articles they maintain there are no serious problems…" (p. 14)

"The experience of the Dutch people makes it clear that legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia is not the answer to the problems of people who are terminally ill. The Netherlands has moved from assisted suicide to euthanasia, from euthanasia for people who are terminally ill to euthanasia for people who are chronically ill, from euthanasia for physical illnesses to euthanasia for psychological distress, and from voluntary euthanasia to involuntary euthanasia (called "termination of the patient without explicit request"). The Dutch government's own commissioned research has documented that in more than one thousand cases a year, doctors actively cause or hasten death without the patient's request." (p. 23)

"Virtually every guideline established by the Dutch to regulate euthanasia has been modified or violated with impunity." (p. 23)

"In the selling of assisted suicide and euthanasia, words like 'empowerment' and 'dignity' are associated with the choice for dying. But who is being empowered? The more one knows about individual cases, the more apparent it becomes that needs other than those of the patient often prevail. Empowerment flows towards the relatives, the doctor who offers a speedy way out if he cannot offer a cure, or the activists who have found in death a cause that gives meaning to their own lives. The patient who may have asked to die in the hope of receiving emotional reassurance that all around her want her to live, may find that like Louise [an earlier stated example] she has set in motion a process whose momentum she cannot control." (pp. 43-4)



Conclusion

In short, there are no scientific, medical or ethical reasons why any of us, not just Christians, should condone or support the legalization of euthanasia in society.

No one can prevent someone intent on the act from taking out a revolver and blowing their brains out, or administering a lethal dose of drugs to themselves or another. But that is not the issue here.

The issue here is whether there are sound reasons why a society and a nation should acquiesce in the process by legalizing it. If we are intent on protecting the weak and retaining our current culture of life, in the Hippocratic tradition, then we must face whether we would rather introduce a culture of uncertainty and of death as has happened in The Netherlands. A culture where we can never be sure whether someone, somewhere believes that our quality of life is such that the world – according to their worldview – would be better off without us or those we love.

"No man has power to retain the spirit, or power over the day of death"
Ecclesiastes 8:8 (ESV)

Taken from the Suicide Factsheets, the NRLC Dept. of Medical Ethics, Washington, 2004.
Peter Cprivatised Glover is the author of The Politics of Faith: Essays on the morality of key current affairs *available from his website where he keeps a daily web log/blog at www.wiresfromthebunker.com*

We, as Christian physicians and dentists, believe that human life is a gift from God and is sacred because it bears God's image. Human life has worth because Christ died to redeem it, and it has meaning because God has an eternal purpose for it.

From the website of the Christian Medical and Dental Assoc. http://www.cmdahome.org

Managing time: a new season begins

Reflections on Stewardship
Rick De Graaf

"The seasons are fixed by wisdom divine" – so begins verse 8 of Psalter Hymnal #104 – a hymn setting of Psalm 104. We can take comfort knowing it is our Heavenly Father that sets the seasons as time continues to march on. The Psalm writer so aptly writes: "These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time (Ps. 104:27)." May we look to God first "at the proper time" as we embark on another season of learning at school, through church programs and other activities after a summer of vacation.

As a new season begins it's a good time to think about time and its proper use. We are bound by it and we realize that time is a precious limited entity. It seems that we're always running out of it, or chasing after it, or making up for lost time. Time is a 'one-way' street; one can't make a U-turn and retrace time that has gone by.

Our stewardship (use and care) of time is very important especially as we consider how we may find the time to give to God and our neighbor. To do so we need to be good managers of the time he gives us. As the popular adage says 'if you fail to plan, you plan to fail' – and so it is especially true for our time management.

Ever notice how, that time during vacations seems to disappear faster than when we are working? Like meetings without an agenda, time can fritter away. It seems that even in times of vacation we need to plan so that we are able to see and do the things we want so much to do.

My mother is very methodical about her time. She seems to have an unwritten agenda for every day of the week. Early every Monday morning she'll have the wash well underway before breakfast. Daily, she'll have coffee, tea and meals at their appointed times and she knows which programs she wants to watch, when she will go and get the mail or groceries, or when she needs to take her pills. It seems that her routines are restrictive and predictable to the point of being boring; yet their order seems to free her from an anxiety about things forgotten to be done or missed opportunities not taken.

Like agendas for meetings, it is important to plan or budget our time. That sounds like work, but time is easily wasted and lost. There is a snowstorm of materials available that are ready to advise us: books, software, day timers, palm-sized electronic personal data assistants and other tools to help us squeak more time out of each day. Time management is big business!

Yes, these tools can be useful when they are used properly but they can also become an obsession or time waster for some – when too much time is spent on planning and reorganizing their time again and again. As you prepare to juggle time in your life: time for family, time for work, time for neighbor, time for church, school and time for recreation consider the following basic time planning steps:

Time Planning Steps

1. Begin by creating a list – electronically or on paper. I prefer the latter because I like the satisfaction of crossing out completed items. List all the things that you need to do. Include both immediate and long-term items, deadlines, committee or council meetings, home visits (elders), appointments that show up on your appointment calendar, birthdays and anniversaries, and things like the car that needs servicing. Make the list as complete as possible. Incomplete lists can make you anxious: What did I forget? Leave space to add more as your day progresses (phone calls, emails, mail). Once you've got your list, take a moment to commit your activities to the Lord in prayer. God cares about what you do, even the small things so make them count.

2. Prioritize by coding your list:

· Consider which items on the list are urgent and important, that need to be done today. Circle or asterisk them.

· Consider the item(s) that give you the most sense of dread (I really don't want to do this), an item that you know you'll put off until it's almost too late if you don't do something about it now. Underline these or mark them in red.

· Consider the items that are important but not urgent, items that don't have a deadline today but are important for your work and your future career. Mark them with an arrow in the margin.

· Consider the items that build relationships: phone calls, visits, email, thank you cards etc. Circle or asterisk them. They are very important and should receive our priority.

· Skimp on the trivial items. Some are no-brainers. Leave them for when your mental energy is low – certain hours of the day. Don't mark them with anything. If they get left for another day that's just fine.

· Decide when you will block out some time for devotions and self-development. In the margin write a target-time interval. Studying/reading a book gets done if you take a section each day. It may be helpful to have calls directed to an answering machine so that you can concentrate.

3. Get Started. Act! Start with an asterisked item and preferably tackle one of the red ones: getting at least one of the dread items out of the way will make you feel so much better. Note the target time you set aside for the self-development item. Mix in some of the arrowed (important but not urgent) items among the urgent ones. One such item is preparing for an evening meeting, whether as a leader or member: review the agenda and notes. Preparing for a meeting earlier in the day (when possible) will make you more relaxed and free to maximize your time with your family who will miss your presence because of the meeting.

4. Scratch off completed tasks! Crossing off a completed item is satisfying. A well-scratched-off list at the end of the day feels good and gives you a sense of accomplishment.

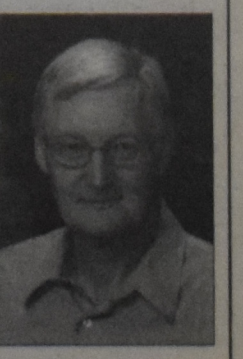
May God bless you as you use your time to make a difference in terms of his Kingdom. It's the stewardly thing to do!

Stewardly Tip: Time is best invested in relationships: both vertically with God and horizontally with my neighbours. Test your plans in terms of the relationships it will touch and encourage. Plan your task so that it can encourage a relationship i.e., I'll help you wash the car if you'll help me wash the dishes.

Readers: Share your Stewardly Tips so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Developing Talents

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email:rickd@csservices.ca



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Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

What is your church studying this fall?

"Pete, I love you, but I'm leaving the church," my wife said quietly,... "the truth is, I would be happier separated than married. At least then you would have to take the kids on weekends. Then maybe you'd even listen!"...

"That is out of the question," I bellowed. "Don't even think about it!"

She was calm and resolute in her decision. I was enraged. A good Christian wife, married to a Christian (and a pastor I may add), does not do this. I understood at that moment why a husband could fly into a rage and kill the wife he loves.

She had asserted herself. She was forcing me to listen. I wanted to die. This was going to require me to change!

Peter Scazzero in *The Emotionally Healthy Church*

Geri's above ultimatum came after eight years of unrelenting stress. Her husband, Peter Scazzero acknowledges in his book she had been more than patient throughout those years. Still, he vehemently opposes her demand that he look at himself and work on the changes he has to make. A less assertive wife would not have been able to confront her husband in this way and we can only wonder how the marriage would have fared over time. At the same time, a less mature husband would have bellowed some more or fallen into stoic and angry silence. But Peter decides he would hold himself up for scrutiny and work on the necessary changes.

No guarantee

Pable Neruda, a Chilean poet, once wrote it isn't adversity that separates us but (lack of) growing. If this is so, can we not with some work avoid some of the painful pitfalls of internal personal relationships? Still, being a people of vision and scripture does not guarantee us a special place in the sun.

Author Marilee Dunker points this out in *Days of Glory, Seasons of Night*. The book reads like a novel but is based on real life. We feel sad as the author describes the troubled relationship of her parents Lorraine and Bob Pierce, founder of the immensely successful World Vision organization. We cannot help but wonder how this relationship deteriorated so badly in light of Lorraine's first meeting with Bob, when she strongly sensed God had great plans for him. Dunker hopes by hauling the skeletons out of the closet, others will learn from the mistakes of her parents and not suffer similar family sorrows.

The Copernican Revolution of today?

Peter Scazzero in the above book brings our attention to the paradigm shift from the Ptolemy's way of thinking that the sun and the universe revolved around the earth to the findings of Copernicus that the earth was simply one of the many planets orbiting the sun in our vast universe. He reminds us this new paradigm shook the foundations of how society and church viewed itself. It was deeply unsettling to admit that people were only a small speck in the vast galaxy. He now uses the concept of the Copernican revolution to describe how we need to look at our spiritual life in a more holistic way.

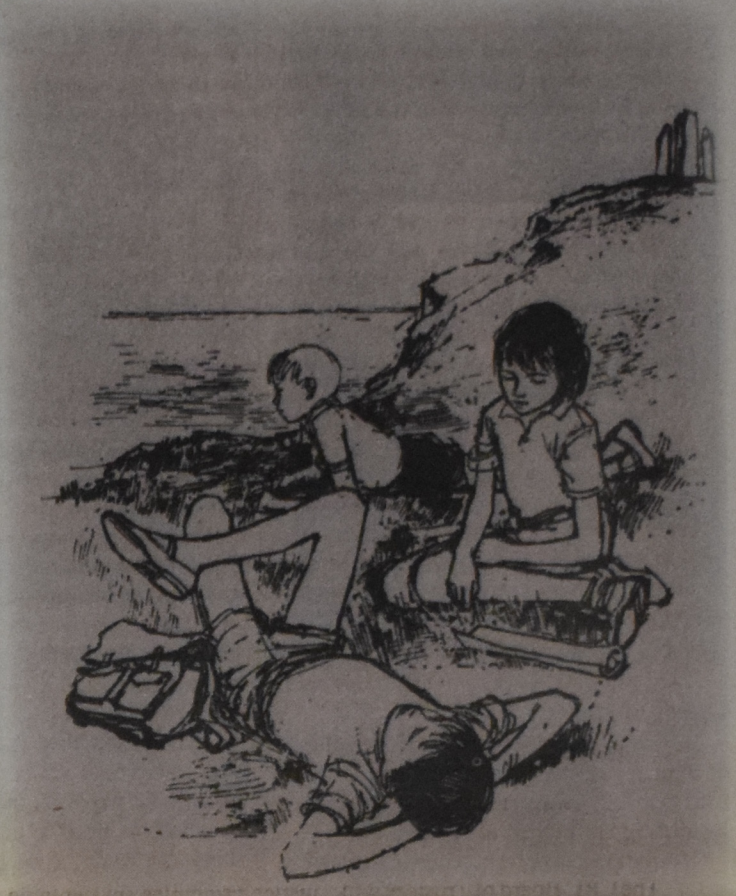
Peter Scazzero fervently believes emotional and spiritual health are inseparable and insists it is not possible for a Christian to be spiritually mature while remaining emotionally immature. He suggests six principles of an emotionally healthy congregation: look beneath the surface, break the power of the past, live in brokenness and vulnerability, receive the gift of limits, embrace grieving and loss, make incarnation your model for loving well.

He speaks from experience. We may want to listen and check out the study topics our church is offering this fall. It could be a step towards growth.

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca

September choices

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema



It's September, and your children didn't get to decide if they were going to return to school. They also didn't pick their teacher. Neither did they select their own curriculum, schedule, or classmates. But in the school year ahead they'll make many choices that will have an impact on their classroom community and themselves.

Each day your children will choose between being respectful or disrespectful, between participating in class or refusing to take part, between working productively or wasting time, between being neat or messy, and between being an encourager or gossiping about classmates.

Sometimes we parents mistakenly assume that our children begin making real choices only when they are older – decisions such as how to spend their money, whom to date, and which college to attend. But that's not the case. In the mystery novel, *A Presumption of Death*, an elderly mother of several children says to her adult daughter, "It's only grownups who want children to be children; children themselves always want to be real people." And real people, no matter what their age, make real choices with lasting consequences.

Are your children aware of the dynamic of choice in their lives? Do they realize that their choices can have genuine consequences that are positive or negative? Help them grow in this awareness. Point out several life-affirming choices they can make that will contribute to a happy, healthy, and wholesome school year.

For example, teach your kids that people choose how to view themselves – with disdain, pride, shame, self-respect, or love. Tell them about the choice made by bent-over, elderly Miss Liza, the librarian in Katherine Paterson's *The Same Stuff as Stars*. When 11-year-old Angel tells Miss Liza how inconsequential she feels in comparison to the stars and the sky, Miss Liza quotes Psalm 8 to the troubled girl. Then Miss Liza says, "When people look down on me, I remember that God looks at this pitiful, twisted old thing that I have become and crowns me with glory." God also crowns our children with his glory! But they must choose to recognize this awesome fact and live accordingly. When they do, their attitude toward themselves, their teachers, and their classmates will be delightful to God.

In this school year your children may encounter few difficulties. On the other hand, they may face many serious obstacles. Perhaps personality conflicts with classmates will surface or academic challenges will arise. Your children may experience physical or emotional illnesses. Teach them that they are not powerless in such circumstances; they can choose how to respond. They can become bitter, defeated, or crushed, or they can do what Gaudior, the unicorn in Madeleine l'Engle's *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, encourages Charles Wallace to do. The young boy must venture on a treacherous journey in order to stop the annihilation of the world by the deranged dictator Madog Branzillo. Worried about the outcome, Charles Wallace says to Gaudior, "And if all does not go well?" Gaudior replies, "Let us hold firmly to all going well." Whenever one of my kids faced a huge hurdle, we often repeated Gaudior's words. We chose to believe that through prayer, love, and the Holy Spirit's power God was working in all things for our good because we love him and have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). We held firmly "to all going well."

Your children have various gifts: intellectual talents, athletic abilities, technical proficiency, social skills, spiritual insights, and musical aptitude. In the coming school year they must choose what to do with these gifts. Govon, in Bill Richardson's novel, *After Hamelin*, is a gifted harp maker and harpist "who could charm the music out of wood." He tells his young daughter Penelope, "The gifts we are born with are mysterious ... and it is best not to ask too many questions. Our duty is to accept them and to use them. And of course, we must be thankful for them. Many gifts have wilted because of ingratitude" (pp.14). All the things Govon mentions – accepting our gifts, using them, and being thankful for them – involve choices. What choices will your children make in regard to their gifts? How can you encourage them to accept, use, and appreciate their talents?

Though you fervently wish it were not so, in this school year your children might witness classmates being teased, bullied, ignored, or gossiped about. Teach your children that they can choose not to stand idly by or be intimidated into taking part. Helen Prejean in *Dead Man Walking*, which chronicles her work as a spiritual

Continued on page 14...

Restorative Justice and the CRC Synod

John de Vries

After the June meeting of Synod, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) as a denomination has a richer future. Restorative justice (RJ) principles and practices were proposed, debated, and unanimously accepted to be incorporated into the life of CRC churches.

In Chicago, the three representatives of the Synod 2005 Restorative Justice Study Report, Dr. Rev. Clayton Libolt, Mrs Gail Rice and Rev. John de Vries met with the Synodical Pre-advice Committee to discuss the report and answer questions. Synod's unanimous acceptance of the eight motions testify to the quality of the report, the timeliness of the topic and the felt need to update CRC justice ministries.

The Reformation made many reforms, but the justice system and its blindfolded lady justice inherited from the Roman era, did not receive the Reformers' consideration.

The CRC Board of Trustees will decide how the recommendations of Synod will be implemented. Developing a network of regional volunteers to nurture awareness of restorative justice ministries and needs has been discussed. Already the denominational justice website provides a forum for all members to exchange restorative justice resources and experiences. As more new opportunities and needs surface, the horizon for effective and healing CRC restorative justice ministries keeps expanding.

For Rev. John de Vries the action of Synod marks another significant step on his eight year restorative justice pilgrimage. The journey began in 1997 when he, as member of the Ontario Multifaith Council (OMC) Research Committee, submitted a proposal that the OMC place restorative justice on the OMC agenda. The acceptance by OMC has led to Family Group Conferencing workshops and the development of training materials.

At the same time presentations were made to the Committee for Contact with the Government. As a follow-up Peter VanderMeulen (CRC Office for Social Justice and World Hunger) and Rev. John de Vries collaborated to initiate the first CRC Criminal Justice Consultation. The Feb. 2002 consultation was attended by CRC judges, lawyers, prosecutors, wardens, chaplains, police, parents and youth workers. It was unanimously concluded that present Criminal Justice System is failing, that the voice of the church needs to be heard, and that members need support and guidance.

Informal discussions with British Columbia Synod 2001 delegate, Rev. Henry Numan, led to the action by Classis BC Northwest and the development of a Restorative Justice Overture submitted to Synod 2003. In response to the Classis BC Northwest Overture, Synod appointed and mandated the Restorative Justice Study Committee to probe more deeply into Scripture for supports, to include the American Criminal Justice realities and report to Synod 2005.

Now the seeds of Restorative Justice have been visibly planted within the life and ministry of the CRC denomination. Synod's decision marks the beginning of a longer journey as CRC members reach for new horizons. Rooted in biblical teachings, restorative justice principles set the table for reparation, restitution, reconciliation and forgiveness.

In Southwest Ontario, the Chatham-Kent Restorative Justice Committee, started by CRC members, has just received provincial government funding. This will facilitate the hiring of trained staff to begin restorative justice conferencing. With referrals from the judges and police, trained staff will facilitate restorative justice sessions with offending youth and work toward personal and community healing as alternative to jail.

How does restorative justice work?

It can take different shapes. In South Africa, for example, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did effective work. Native circle sentencing is another. Conferencing, originally developed in New Zealand and Australia, was introduced in the USA by Real Justice, located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and in Canada by the Mennonite Central Committee staff and the RCMP. It is the model used most in Ontario.

For RJ conferencing to be initiated the offender must admit their guilt if the process is to considered by the judge. Offenders are made accountable for harms done in a way that the current system, focused solely on past behavior and future punishment, does not do. Victims have an opportunity to express their anger and pain and to ask for reparation from the offender.

Often, guided by trained facilitators, unscheduled miracles of reconciliation take place between victim and offender. Forgiveness happens and God's grace is experienced again.

Restorative justice does not replace the criminal justice system and jails. Restorative justice provides alternatives that focus on personal accountability, on the larger social context, on healing, and on a future in which a life that was violated or broken can begin anew.

When both victim and offender agree to the process, restorative justice enacted through family group conferencing provides a more satisfying alternatives for victim and offender as they work for peace – a present day anticipation of shalom. By bringing offenders and victims together, closure for victims is achieved and life begins again.

Synod's decision challenges members to respond with integrity to justice needs in the home, the school, the workplace, related institutions and the community. The principles of restorative justice grounded in Scriptures go beyond criminal justice and relate to justice for all age groups and in all realms of life.

While we wait for word from the Board of Trustees as to how the Synodical recommendations will be implemented, we pray that the Lord will continue to bless the growing CRC restorative justice vision, practice and witness.

Rev. John de Vries Jr, London, Ont., August 9, 2005

Happily ever after

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

Sometime ago I signed up with a reputable writers' institute for a program called, "Breaking into Print." I wanted to sharpen my skills and develop my writing to the level where I'd feel justified in spending regular, serious time on it. You could choose between writing articles or fiction, and since I wanted to stretch my abilities, I chose fiction. I failed to consider that stretching can be painful.

I envisioned the exhilaration of setting my imagination free on the page and producing short stories of a caliber not seen since the days of Flannery O'Connor. On the other hand, I convinced myself that I have nothing to say that hasn't already been said by a thousand others, far more effectively than I could ever do.

I'm beginning to think that this is the hallmark mentality of a real writer – a vastly superior inferiority complex.

Writing articles and devotionals is challenging, but fun. Writing personal essays is rewarding, but makes me feel vulnerable. Writing fiction feels like I'm walking a tightrope over Niagara Falls. To carry it off well makes me a hero in my own mind, but to fall … well, it sure is a long way down. Somehow I managed to fight off my massive insecurities long enough to actually put pencil to paper and make that first shaky attempt at fiction. The fact that I paid for the course in advance helped.

The feedback from my instructor was enthusiastic. Glowing remarks about my style and ability filled the pages of my manuscript, but she also cautioned me about staying positive. There had to be, she advised, some clear change for the better in the lead character (in this case, a crusty old lady), so that the reader would be encouraged and satisfied at the end of the story. Not exactly what I had in mind, I nonetheless rewrote the ending and sent it back. My teacher loved it. I had my doubts.

I wrote a few more stories and the pattern became predictable. I would present what I thought were realistic characters in difficult situations, who mostly learned to cope (successfully) with their reality rather than overcome it. My teacher would prod me to keep it "uplifting." I complied by writing what I consider happy/sappy endings. She views them as "marketable." I think they're a little trite.

Keep in mind the course is focused on achieving publication. There isn't a huge market for short stories in general, and even a smaller niche for Christian writing. (Anyway, I'd rather be a writing Christian than someone who necessarily sets out to produce "Christian writing.")

My instructor is a highly successful Christian writer, who tells me our job is to "entertain and encourage" our readers. She cuts across a broad swath of genres, with numerous books and countless articles to her credit. The woman knows whereof she speaks. Maybe that's what troubles me the most.

Fiction by definition means you create the story rather than simply reiterate fact. My imagination is free to take the plot in whatever direction I please. But a good fiction writer lets the writing lead the story. To contrive a happy ending for its own sake is just wrong. I once heard James Schaap say that fiction is "false to history, but true to experience." That's the kind of writing I want to put out. To sugarcoat a story for the sake of entertainment value is like substituting junk food for a fine meal.

I read a novel awhile ago which dealt with spousal abuse within the church. The author handled the topic sensitively and honestly, conveying some important truths. But in the last chapter all wounds were abruptly healed and most of the characters suddenly lived happily ever after. Why would a writer who had the courage to take on an issue of this magnitude gift wrap the ending like that? I learned that it was because the publisher felt this was a more "satisfying" conclusion for Christian audiences.

Personally I am more satisfied with a book that haunts me with questions for weeks after I put it down than with one that gives me all the answers I know can't be true. As Christians, we have the hope that outshines all others. Whatever our vocation, that's the message we need to carry with us. We walk through the same bleak and broken world as non-believers, but our trust is in the faithful one who never lets us walk alone. We need not gloss over the pain and suffering all around us because our God gives us the fortitude to look it squarely in the eye. And if that's not a message of hope, I don't know what is.

Heidi VanderSlikke lives in Harriston, Ont. Her email: hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com

Ecclesiastes

Authentic and inauthentic in religion

A. A. van Ruler

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.
Ecclesiastes 5:1 (NIV)

The first thing that strikes me in these words of the Preacher is that he does still go to the temple and participate in the worship service. That may surprise us moderns. Why does someone who complains so deeply about the futility of human striving and about the complete unfathomableness of God and his way with the world still go to church? For most the discovery of the absurdity of human existence is a good reason not to believe in God and to stop going to church. Even if it isn't a genuine reason, it is often a good excuse: How can you worship a God you don't understand?

When you really let this question sink in, however, you suddenly become aware of how superficial it really is. Must we really be able to comprehend God and figure him out to be able to worship him and serve him? Is the central thing to comprehend things, to gain insight into the rational coherence of things? Is doing not much more than thinking and comprehending?

Even if it is not transparent, reality is there, isn't it? A person can pose a thousand unanswerable questions; nevertheless, he is still there and so is reality, and so is the necessity of being and acting.

He is there most truly when he plumbs to the roots of reality and understands himself to be a creature of God and in his doings respects his Creator. In fact, at the heart of the church's liturgy, worship and faith is the fact that we do *not* comprehend God but reverently acknowledge him. If we understand everything, then we would no longer need to believe in him and praise him.

So the first thing we see is that the Preacher's pessimism does not keep him from going to church. The second thing that strikes me is that he insists on the seriousness of going to church. For him to insist on anything is remarkable in and of itself. He still wants to participate with others and in life. His train of thought doesn't lead him to say: 'Since everything is in vain anyhow, it doesn't matter what you do. You may as well do whatever you please.' No, he insists on life's seriousness. He doesn't just reflect on the futility of reality, but he also turns to his fellow human beings to admonish them.

He urges them to vigilance particularly in temple attendance. There are many who go to the temple out of custom, without thinking, to bring their offerings out of habit. Even fools do that. The fools are the godless who do whatever they like in their daily life. They go their own way in profound ignorance. They act as if they know nothing of God and of his commandments. But they still go to the temple regularly to bring their obligatory offerings. They hardly know what they are doing, but they do it because it's part of their customs. Perhaps they are driven by a vague sense that in this way they are making things right.

It is this that the Preacher condemns. He says: "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God." He uses an image – the image of walking. We can walk without thinking, carelessly, almost unconsciously. Then we risk stumbling over a rock or root. We can also walk carefully, looking out where we're going. Then we are guarding our steps. Then we are fully aware of what we are doing. This is how we should go to the temple or to church.

Then we should be fully aware of what it is that we are doing, for worship isn't just one more thing among others, just another activity. It is to stand before our Creator God. It is to arrive at the most essential thing in being human. When we do that, we must know what we are doing.

We should know what we are doing when we are pounding nails. You have to pay attention; otherwise, you will hit your thumb. But it is especially necessary to pay attention when we arrive at the most fundamental moment of our existence.

The Preacher is, thus, protesting against the emptiness and futility of the way we practice our religion. Participating mechanically out of habit turns religion into an empty, idle, meaningless gesture. It becomes like a painted Easter egg – pretty on the outside, but it is nothing but an empty shell. Reality is often like that. Sometimes, says the Preacher, you get the feeling that the whole world is nothing but an empty eggshell. But you must not reduce your temple-going to such an empty thing by the way you participate.

So he is demanding authenticity in worship. We must live lives of reverence and fruitfulness, humility and thoughtfulness, justice and respect before our Creator. We may not be able to fulfill that in all respects. Habit, mechanicalness, externality and social manners play an important role in our lives, also in religion. To judge everything in terms of authenticity, sincerity of heart, so that everything must issue purely from within, is to make life impossible. It would create inhuman demands on us. It soon becomes obvious that we are not able to be completely authentic from the inside out. There is also the other pole of the outside, of community, of set habits and of lifestyle.

Chruch entrance, St. Mary, Redcliffe, England

Down through the ages living a life of complete authenticity has been tried many times. It has produced magnificent examples of human life. People tried to live in continuous awareness of walking with God. They tried in everything to be conscious that they were living before the face of God, to be conscious of the ultimate seriousness of all things, to always be aware of the slightest rustlings in the inner life, to be always on guard over oneself, constantly shaping oneself.

When we encounter such selves in literature or in reality, we can hardly stop gazing at them, for their entire lives have become stylized. They remind you of a young girl dressed and made up to go to the ball: everything is just so. Nothing out of place.

But this way can suddenly morph into its opposite. Such a person becomes trapped in an exaggerated sense of life's seriousness. Then authenticity suddenly becomes inauthentic. One ends up in artificiality, phoniness, affectation – which have given such a bad connotation to the word *piety*. Then piety becomes sanctimoniousness.

But we must not throw out the baby with the bathwater. On the one hand stand piety as sanctimoniousness; on the other, piety as mechanical habit. An aversion to both may lead to an indifference that has arisen out of a deep need for authenticity.

The Preacher warns us against all three. He says we must not abandon our worship of God. But we must not participate in it mechanically. Nor must we embrace an inflated spirituality. But we must stand before our Creator God down to earth, reverently and aware of what we are doing. The earth is filled with mystery, but we must walk amid these mysteries in reverence and in awe.

September choices ...*continued from p. 12*

not to stand idly by or be intimidated into taking part. Helen Prejean in *Dead Man Walking*, which chronicles her work as a spiritual director to a convicted murderer on death row, says, "The valley of the victimized in this country is wide and deep and growing. In such a sea of pain what can one person do? Better, I decide, to try to help ten real hurting people – or nine, or one – than to be overwhelmed and withdraw and do nothing...." Our children, too, can learn at a young age to choose to make a difference – to help one person. It's imperative that our children realize they can choose to say no to acts of violence, however seemingly insignificant, and yes to affirming the well-being of their peers.

When pointing out the dynamic of choice to your kids, remind them of God's grace and what it means. Why grace? Because whenever our children face choices, they'll encounter the reality of their sin. Though we pray that they'll make God-honoring decisions, we know they can also make mistakes. In *Traveling Mercies*, Anne LaMott describes grace this way: "I do not at all understand the mystery of grace – only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us." When our children sin, we may meet them where they are with the good news of God's grace and then guide them to new places characterized by holy decisions.

Encourage your children to honor God in all their September choices and throughout the school year.

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"Oh Aunty Em, there's no place like home."

Christopher DeVinck

In 1920, the poet Robert Frost bought a small stone and wood house in Shaftsbury, Vermont. He and his family lived there for nine years while he wrote many famous poems, including "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening," which was included in his first Pulitzer Prize winning book, *New Hampshire*.

A few years ago, this house was opened to the public for the first time, so I, being a former high school English teacher, and a dilettante in the writing of poems, decided to visit Shaftsbury.

Located on Vermont's historic Route 7A, the little house is surrounded with seven acres, all that remains of the original property.

When I drove down the small driveway, I noticed the barn, a few apple trees, the house to the right, and nothing more.

Robert Frost home in Shaftsbury in 1928 (his son is sitting on the grass) and as it is now.

The main building, a charming example of early American architect, built about 1769, was disappointing. The downstairs rooms were empty, except for large photographic murals covering some of the walls with bits of biographical information neatly printed under pictures of a young Robert Frost, and images of his family. Encased, in a prominent position, was a facsimile, not even the original, of the poet's draft of his famous poem. He wrote it, after all, in that very dining room. Visitors were forbidden to investigate the upstairs rooms because, apparently, there are government regulations about the size, pitch, and width of staircases for public places, and the stone house did not meet those regulations. I have visited Washington Irving's home in Tarrytown, New York. You can see the writer's desk where he created *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. I visited Mark Twain's house in Hartford, Connecticut and saw his bed, his pool table, and the very place where he wrote *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The Nobel Prize winning novelist, Pearl Buck, owned a beautiful house in Pennsylvania where nearly everything she owned is still there, just as she left it.

When I visit a writer's home, I like to see his hat, or his book, or her shoes and manuscripts.

I've lived in two houses all of my life. From 1951-1977 I lived in the family homestead, the house my parents bought in 1948 when they arrived from Europe after the horrors of World War II. And when Roe and I married, we bought a two bedroom house in 1977, and we've been here ever since. My parents are still alive, eating in the same kitchen, plucking the same daffodils each spring, gripping the same oak banister, with more tenacity than in the past, as they make their way each evening to their room where I was conceived 54 years ago.

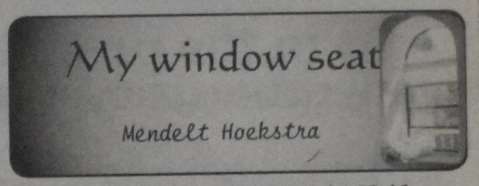
In this house where I write, there are paintings that have not been moved from their spots in 28 years. Roe and I have raised three children here, cooked over 10,000 meals, washed the same tub about 1,400 times, made love approximately 728 times. The seasons changed 112 twelve times. I wrote eleven books of essays in this house, 1,349 poems, one children's novel, and an adult, literary novel, as of yet unsold and gathering dust. This is the house where our children first spoke. This is the house where I copied some poems of mine on the basement wall before I covered them up with sheet rock. Squeaks in the floorboards. The schoolhouse clock. Flower boxes. Home.

What I did like about Robert Frost's house was the idea that he actually looked through the very windows I used to peer out of his dining room. I liked that the barn was the same barn that existed when Frost wrote poetry. Some of the apple trees were the same trees in the yard during his nine, most productive years.

After I become an internationally famous writer, after the President of the United States asks me to read one of my poems at her inauguration, after I win a Nobel Prize for literature, and after Roe and I are old and gray and full of sleep, I'll sell this place and make sure that I leave behind some books, and shoes, and some dried flowers from the garden. I'll leave the room filled with bookshelves, carpets, dressers. I'll post specific rules that you are allowed, no matter what the government says, to go up the non-standard stairs and look around as much as you like, and I'll leave the kettle on the stove so that anyone who visits can sit at the kitchen table and sip from a cup of hot coffee.

And if I don't become famous, well, I'll leave the kettle behind just the same for the new owners of the house because they will like to know that this was a home for warm-brewed living.

Life, I love you



Sorrow's grip on me is slowly fading. Let me explain. Half a year ago, Marisa and I were busting with joy after we found out we were expecting our third child. There is little in this world that excites me more than expecting new life. A new house is exciting, a new job is thrilling but a new life trumps all other things. I believe that there is nothing more beautiful than a pregnant woman and nothing more sacred than life itself.

Our joy at being pregnant was shared with family, friends and colleagues alike. I found myself telling strangers that I was going to be a father again regardless if they displayed the least bit of interest.

After a number of months, our prayers of joy and thankfulness quickly turned to prayers of concern when Marisa started having complications. Those prayers of concern then turned to prayers of pleading. Those prayers of pleading and begging then turned to anger and sorrow when our worst fears were confirmed: the unborn child had died.

My thoughts swirled with questions. Why would God get our hopes up? Why would God allow us to get pregnant if he knew the baby was going to die? How do you grieve for a child that never spoke or breathed air? One person asked if we had the right to grieve since we already had two children and there are countless other couples that cannot conceive at all.

The doctor at the hospital called our child "reproductive matter." The nurse called our child "it." Someone else told us that our baby would be waiting for us in heaven; while another remarked that not all children get to live on earth, some go straight to heaven.

When word got out about our ordeal, we realized that we were part of yet another elite group. Marriage is one of those elite groups. Being a single adult or a grandparent are clubs that others who are not in those situations can identify with. When it comes to having children, a textbook can only teach you so much. To fully comprehend the feeling, one must go through the experience.

When our first child was born, I was immediately reminded of the Beatles' song "With a little help from my friends." In that song Ringo Starr sings, "Would you believe in love at first sight? Yes I'm certain it happens all the time." I don't know if he was speaking about watching a baby being born, but he could very well have been. I did not believe in love at first sight until our first son was born.

Someone who had also experienced a miscarriage told us that we would never forget it. Not true. While we did think about it for most every minute of the day at first, we did have small pockets of forgetting. But then when we remembered, it hurt all over again. Working in an organization with more than 250 employees, I still get questions on how Marisa's pregnancy is going. Retelling the story is difficult and healing all in one.

One friend told me of a similar experience. After having a miscarriage, she and her husband planted a magnolia tree because it blooms for a short period and then the flowers fall. We also planted a tree; ironically it needed hours and weeks of nursing to survive the transplant.

While we hastily get bored with childhood, rush to grow up and then wish to be a child again, sad events like miscarriages remind us that every life is sacred and that the Lord is God over us and our children. In the same way that my one-and-a-half-year-old does not understand why she cannot eat markers or drink paint, I do not understand God's ways.

What I do know is that God decided to take our child early. I trust by the grace of his promise that he is enjoying our child, and one day he will let us see him or her again.

Mendelt D. Hoekstra is the founder and director of the Music Therapy program at Bethesda, an organization owned and operated by the Mennonite Brethren Conference of Ontario, that supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives in Vineland, Ontario with Marisa and their two children.

Celebration

Feast in the promised land

Nobleford, Alberta CRC 100 years

Tom Polet

As we drove through the fertile fields towards Nobleford on July 1, 2005, it dawned on me that our perception of the agriculture enterprise today is in sharp contrast to the first impression of the settlers in early 1900. The early pioneers looked at the unbroken prairie for the first time and wondered whether a pair of oxen would be enough to pull the plow, while today's descendants wonder how they can afford a $150,000 tractor. Both have thrived under pressure, hardship and above all, faith.

There is, perhaps one common denominator between the pioneer of early Alberta and the computer driven farmer of today and that is the feel and the love of the land. With all the pitfalls that farming entails, it has always amazed me why anyone wanted to be a farmer – except for the touch of the soil pulsing the desire of the heart. Fortunately for us, a farmer has that or else the buffaloes would still be roaming the wide open prairies and we would all have to become hunters for food.

Although Sarah and I have no direct connection to the Nobleford congregation, we know several members there, but above all we wanted to celebrate with them 100 years of God's faithfulness in the Christian Reformed Church. And what better place to do that than with this first congregation of our denomination.

Many sons and daughters of this congregation have moved away to expand their horizons beyond the wide open vistas of their prairie homeland, but the call had gone out to them: "Come home and celebrate." Many of them, with their offspring, heeded the call. And celebrate they did.

I met Tymen Hofman there, with two of his sons and a grandson. Being a son of the congregation and a passionate explorer of the history of Nobleford and indeed of the entire CRC in Canada, he is the most qualified to write about this celebration. (I refer to his most recent book: *The history of the CRC in Canada, its first 100 years*, and his previous book: *The Strength of our Years*.)

But I agreed to write about the banquet. The banquet celebration went far beyond sharing a meal. My father used to say: "Nothing bonds more than sharing a meal together." Witnessing the bonding at the five-hour long banquet gathering, Dad was proven right.

Walking into the gym of the Immanuel Christian High School at Lethbridge, where the banquet was served, you were immediately confronted with a large display of genealogy, photographs of families of the congregation from the early pioneers to today's generation, from the first pioneer, Herman Emmelkamp, to the latest – Ha and Nguyen family, from Vietnam.

It is wonderful to see that the grandchildren of the early families continue to be faithful members of the congregation and also continue to farm the land. And it is rather amazing that eighty percent of the congregation are descendants of the early families. God's faithfulness and grace, passing through the generations.

I was told that in the early years of the CRC in Canada ninety-five percent of its members were involved in agriculture, today only two percent. Nobleford therefore is a shining exception.

Women dressed up for the anniversary picnic. More anniversary photos can be viewed on the website at http://www.noblefordcrc.com

Anniversary quilt

When reformed people celebrate, they sing. Appropriately we sang "Dear Land of Home" (tune Finlandia), words worthwhile recalling:

Dear land of home to which our hearts are holden
By loyal love for each familiar scene:
Our mountains guard the fields of grain all golden
The rivers flow through meadows green.
God's children we, his love and power confessing
In this fair land, this pleasant place of home;
And may we strive to be a richer blessing
In service now and through years to come.

The excellent dinner was served in record time and, as was to be expected from a country kitchen, it was excellent and plentiful. While eating our desert, we were entertained by a male quartet, Henry Molenaar, Tony Postman, Henry Postman and Cyril Wichers. Throughout the years Nobleford has always had a quartet. I have heard others, and I was always struck by their wonderful musical quality. Not the booming voices of cattle drivers, but refined, rich and well blending.

When you have a celebration like this, you can't escape the customary array of greetings from various dignitaries. It so happens that the province of Alberta is also celebrating its 100 years as a province, and so it was only fitting that greetings were brought from the premier by a member of Alberta's legislature and from the Prime Minister by the area Member of Parliament. The denomination was represented by Dr. Peter Bergdorf. Each of the CR Churches of Southern Alberta had sent a representative and their well-meaning words could have been compacted into one voice, but we were patient. The Manhatten CRC in Montana also sent a representative, Henry Flikkema. Some of the first settlers in the Nobleford area came from Manhatten, and their ties were maintained for a long time. And William Hofman brought the greetings from the Monarch Reformed Church. Harmony is not only expressed in song.

Lammie Hummel gave an interesting overview of the congregation's history. If, the book of the 100th Anniversary of the Nobleford Church is anything like the one published at its 75th anniversary, it will be a real collector's item. Jennie Emmelkamp and her daughter, Rickie van Dyke recited a poem, written by the 91 years old Jennie, who is one of the two oldest surviving members of the congregation. They have allowed me to publish the poem which I would like to do in the near future.

Martha Albaugh and Wilhelmina Konynenbelt unveiled a large needlepoint anniversary quilt, a real work of art. It depicts not only the various activities and mementos of the congregation but also country scenes, such as the majestic mountains (the unmistakable backdrop to the prairie), a barn, a tractor, a grain elevator (the prairie landmark), a combine and the Noble blade. (Back in 1936 Charles Noble invented a new cultivator, the Noble blade, still widely used in both Canada and the USA.)

The whole evening was in the able hands of the Master of ceremonies, Albert Hummel. It was wonderful to watch the re-acquainting of so many who had come from afar to be "home" once again, and that continued in a memorable Church service the next day.

I am sure that the stories that were told will be recalled during many coffee kletz parties across Canada and the USA. God's incredible grace and his faithfulness are so evident throughout our denomination and it was good and indeed a blessing, to witness that so beautifully in the cradle-church of Nobleford, Alberta.

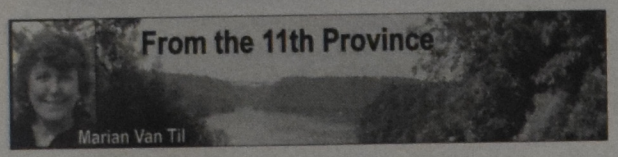
I can say "Thanks" no better than by a poem by Linda Siebenga which appeared in the 75th anniversary book of the Nobleford Church:

Sons of Wind and Soil

Our heritage lies
Not only in the dust
From which we were formed
In His image;
And the ground
To which we cling, seeking at times
Our living from it
Rather than from above.

Our heritage
Lies in the wind
Of the Spirit
That has blown
Through our lives,
Bending, but not breaking us,
Loosening our grasp
On the earth,
So that someday
We will be able
To raise our hands
In praise.

Opinion



'Train up a child in the way that he should go...'

I am still frequently thankful, three decades after my undergraduate schooling ended, that my parents sent me to a Christian elementary school and a Christian high school, and that my father also insisted I go to a Christian college (two, actually, as things turned out). I completed my post-graduate degrees at two secular universities. Still, if any of you think that all that Christian education was, or is, a bit much, that all those years in Christian schools causes isolation from and lack of knowledge of the "real world," I hope you'll think again.

Here in the U.S., many Christian parents, especially evangelicals, have fought tenaciously against banning student prayer in public schools. The move to exorcize such prayer was (is) seen as an important indication that the public schools had moved to the wrong track. I think public education was (and is) on the wrong track; but those parents were also riding the wrong train. They should have been – as many now are – looking much deeper, at the philosophy of education and the psychology of the child which is accepted as gospel in the majority of public schools.

I've had four encounters with the public school system in New York State this summer, none of which would instill confidence in my heart had I any children attending those public schools.

Why? Are kids in the state's schools receiving a bad education? They aren't, necessarily – if by that is meant only that students are able to pass the state tests at all the grade levels at which those tests are administered. After some years of decline, coupled with a decline in the quality of teachers, the state is tightening its requirements – including requirements for teacher certification. To get initial certification, a candidate (or previously uncertified experienced teacher) must pass three four-hour exams: in liberal arts and sciences; in a specific subject area; in "assessment of teaching skills," that last involving developmental psychology, incorporating special needs students, familiarity with varieties of learning and teaching styles and theories.

So why am I concerned? I'm worried – for other people's children and even for society as a whole – because of the nature of some of those theories and the philosophies undergirding them. I'm worried because of the wholesale subjectivity of the "child-centered" approach to education that is now seen as *the* way to get children to learn. I'm worried because among the educational "standards" there is assumed to be no truth, making the standards themselves relative. There are supposed to be no "value judgements" made about content being taught, or about the choice of that content before it's taught. (Of course, such judgements *are* made; they're just not generally admitted to.)

My first encounter with public education this summer was a free three-hour seminar for substitute teachers ("guest teachers"), sponsored by the Orleans-Niagara Board of Cooperative Educational Services. (The state is divided into geographical regions, each served by a BOCES.) My other three encounters were the three exams I took in order to obtain New York State teacher certification.

I attended the seminar not because I'm necessarily going to sign up again as a substitute teacher, but primarily because I thought the seminar subject matter – behavioral issues and teaching strategies – might help me prepare for the third certification exam. It did help; it helped me understand a mind-set mostly foreign to me. Little did I realize what lies at the heart of public education in New York (and in many other states, I've since found out; I can't speak knowledgeably for the Canadian provinces, but I suspect that the situation isn't all that different).

Several things immediately became apparent: first, that each individual child is – or is supposed to be – the center of the educational universe. Now that sounds legitimate; isn't the purpose of education instilling knowledge (never mind wisdom) in children? Apparently not. A model in which the teacher instills knowledge is far too teacher-centered. And, tellingly, parents were not mentioned.

The now accepted model uses a constructivist approach which presents *information* to each student based on his or her current experience of the world, and in ways that suit the specific learning style of each student so that he or she can "respond to" the information, turning it into knowledge. (Other criticisms aside for the moment, in a real classroom this approach makes things extremely difficult for a teacher with 20 or 25 children. The approach explains the need for several teacher aides per classroom, reading specialists, special education professionals, and a host of other helpers). Knowledge only becomes knowledge when the child him- or herself constructs meaning from information (experience = knowledge = reality). When a tree falls in the woods, the constructivist would say it makes no sound unless someone hears it.

In the seminar, the teachers at my table readily accepted the fact that if Freddy and Betty and Billy, amidst a class of, say, 22 students, each show signs of disinterest, boredom or disruptive behavior, the proper response is for the teacher to change his or her teaching style for each of those three students and find ways to engage each of their particular learning styles. (I'm all for trying to meet students real needs; it was, however, assumed that students bear no responsibility of their own for boredom or bad behavior. Bad behavior ("unacceptable" behavior) is merely a result of bad circumstances. (Sin is such a nasty concept.)

We were told that this approach to cognition is based on current brain studies – it coincides with the way we're wired. (Who would dare argue with empirical data?) The brain is also wired to have an attention span of seven minutes. The fact that many children and adults have mere seven-minute attention spans today indeed shows up in the brain studies of such people – because their brains have been short-circuited, so to speak, from early childhood by exposure from birth to the moving-picture images of television/video/computer screens, not because all human brains can assimilate only seven minutes of material at one go. If human beings truly were created with seven-minute attention spans our civilization would be impoverished indeed. Most of the great art, literature, music, and philosophy, theology and scientific discoveries that have come down to us wouldn't exist. Picture Bach writing his profound *Mass in B Minor* in seven-minute increments with breaks in between!

That possibility was lost on the seminar presenter (who would not likely have acknowledged anyway that there is something so hierarchical and objective as "great" art, literature or music. Her own choice of music for the seminar – which she uses in the classroom – betrayed her bias that music is normless, and beauty is strictly in the eye (or ear) of the beholder. And so she stopped her presentation every seven minutes and expected us to stand up and move around.

I, at least, found that highly disruptive and increasingly annoying over a three-hour period. Every time we were getting into a topic, it was interrupted by the "need" to stand and chat for a moment.

The other exceedingly questionable method she employed – one not the least bit dear to my musician's heart – was to play music CDs whenever she wanted us to talk in small groups. We were in essence being invited *not* to listen to the music while being forced to talk over it – precisely what every music teacher works hard to get students to refrain from doing! (I brought this up to her afterwards. She acknowledged that she doesn't do it in seminars to music teachers because it drives them crazy. But she failed to see (and I politely refrained from pointing out to her) that she is using music as a form of noise, and reinforcing undiscerning listening.

Martin Kozloff, Watson Distinguished Professor in education at the University of North Carolina, calls educational contructivism "Sophistry for a New Age." In 1998 he offered a devastating critique which applies all the more now, since constructivism is being so firmly embraced by so many (though it is also creating some backlash). After pointing out evidence of the intellectual dishonesty of this approach, its relativizing of truth, its distortions of the effectiveness of centuries-old traditional teaching methods, and the shaky philosophical foundation on which the theory rests, he wrote:

Constructivism is perhaps best seen as the anarchical utopianism of a socially privileged class (academics) fueled by fake neo-Romantic sentimentality. (See Irving Louis Horowitz, Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason.*) Apparently not embarrassed by their astonishing ignorance of history, sociology, social psychology, anthropology, experimental psychology of learning, and totalitarian societies, constructivists regard American society, bodies of knowledge, "behaviorism," "authority," and "external," "socially-contrived" methods of reasoning, as repressive forms of control over the "naturally-reasonable inner child" in all persons (Rice, 1996, 1998). The primary mission of constructivists, therefore, is to help students "find their inner voices" (in a quasi-religious deification of "the real self"), rather than help students share in the bodies of knowledge (math, science, literature) that constitute our species's effort to understand itself and the world.*

The consequences: Students' "knowledge constructions" need not be tested using explicitly taught, culturally shared beliefs or rules of evidence and logic because such testing would subordinate the individual to external authority. Students' "knowledge" includes opinion, speculation and "plain error." The individual constructs his or her reality because there is no truth. Ironically, in practice, all this subjectivism leads to group-think because students do not "discover truths or verify propositions; they develop interpretations. And these interpretations are constrained by the group's interpretation."

Constructivism was evident in spades in the subject matter and formulation of questions in the certification exams I took. There was virtually no evidence of the works of the masters (aka "dead white males") whose art, literature and music has stood the test of time and has been considered great by many generations previous to this one. If these tests were an indication, Shakespeare never lived; nor did any of the English poets, nor any of the mainstream artists of the past; nor Bach, Handel, Beethoven, Brahms (etc.). The writers and artists named were mostly 20th and 20th century, mostly ethnic, many of them women. The music emphasis was on "world (ethnic folk) music." And in the third exam, any answer that agreed with constructivist theory could be assumed to be the right answer.

All of this is disturbing. And it bleeds over into faith issues. Most Christians receive a public education. Perhaps I shouldn't have been so astonished when I recently uncovered a study reported by George Barna in1991: 52 percent of evangelicals said they did not believe in absolute truth, and in 1994 that rose to 62 percent. (In the general U.S.

Continued on page 18...

Opinion

So I'm an author

Tymen Hofman

As most CC readers likely know, I am an author. Yes, a published author. That's an important distinction, for there are many authors looking for publishers and are not able to find them. Publishing takes money and publishers want a sure bet when it comes to investing their resources in someone's manuscript. So, to be a published author puts you in a desirable class.

I'm fortunate to have had two books published, the first, *The Strength of Their Years*, put out by Knight Publishing in 1983, and *The Canadian Story of the CRC, Its First Century*, by Essence and Guardian Books, admittedly with some financial input on my part. But I'm a published author!

And that is a big deal in a person's life. I shall never forget the day in 1982 when Keith Knight told me he liked my manuscript and that he was ready to publish it. I walked on air. And when the first copy arrived in the mail, I was ecstatic – at least until I found the several typos, etc., that sent me off into orbit. We had rushed too much to get it out by a certain date and skipped the final proofreading.

But I finally settled down and began to luxuriate, looking at the small tome in my hand, bearing my name. And my 87-year-old mother happened to be visiting at the time it arrived, so I proudly showed it to her. She was all smiles as she declared it a wonderful book. It was, of course, being the story of pioneering in her times in Southern Alberta.

And the rewards came when others declared how much they had enjoyed reading those stories, especially those whose lives had some connection with that pioneering experience, or could associate it with similar experiences in Iowa or the Dakotas. I was deeply rewarded. Of course, there were a few glitches, like when someone would read about the sins of the settlement. "Did you really have to tell that story?" my Mother asked. "Of course, Mom, God's grace only appears where there is sin," I said.

That euphoria continued for a long time, especially when an older pastor told me he had read my book three times. That didn't compare with the retired teacher who confessed the need to read it "every once in a while, to help keep my perspective on life." That all was heady stuff. And I still receive appreciation from readers these 20-plus years later.

And now I have my second book. And it came just at the right time to help with the celebration of 100 years of CRC life in Canada, 1905 to 2005. I can assure you that I am a happy and a thankful author. The Lord allowed me, through all the vicissitudes of critical health issues, to complete a task that took the better part of about six years.

But that is not the end of the matter. Getting your book in hand leads to all sorts of regrets and pain. On close reading I've begun to notice that there are mistakes that I can't blame on the editor or the publisher. They all belong to me. And I was determined there would be none of such mistakes, even no typos, since I had the time to search them all out and come with a perfect book. My book would be the exception to the general rule that no book is perfect.

So I soon began to eat humble pie. Not too much of it, of course. Just small mistakes. But as time went on, the mistakes appeared to be rather significant omissions. As a matter of fact, in listing all the Dutch ministers who came to help establish the congregations, I had named only 42 when there were 43. I had omitted the name of the Rev. Gerard Rignalda who came to Lindsay, Ont. from the GKN in 1958. Now, quite providentially, but unknowingly, I had placed his picture on the cover, showing the groundbreaking for the new church in Orillia, Ontario, during his pastorate. So he cheerfully forgave me. However, I soon discovered I had left out a couple of other pastors of the CRC who served churches prior to 1960. I duly proffered my apologies in each case.

Now three omissions is tolerable, I say to myself, but I'm in for more surprises. That list began to grow. My friend Fred Reitsma of Brantford, at my request, did a thorough job of revealing my failures, for which I thank him. He is a bird-dog when it comes to finding the evidence. And now I'm about to put all my dirty linen on the line in the hope of making some restitution, mostly to the families of those whom I omitted, since several have gone on to their reward and I can only hope that bringing their names here will do something to tell the story of their ministries in the early days of the building of the CRC after the Second World War. (And do place this list in your copy of *The Canadian Story of the CRC*.)

I should also add that some ministers deserved more than a mere mention of their names. They should have had sidebars, like John Rubingh, who served in Canada as a student, as a minister and as a home missionary. He did yeoman service.

Now there is a lesson to be learned in all of this, especially for those of tender years – we oldsters are past this stage, of course. It is that in many of life's efforts we only get one opportunity to do it right. Some things just can't be done again. Some that might be repeated usually aren't, and we live with the errors and omissions, and with our regrets. So be careful; be meticulous. Do it right the first time. Check and double-check. Realize that by our well-done job others are blessed. It also ensures a good reward for work we do. It cuts down on the regret of having muffed it and having to feast on humble pie.

Ty Hofman is a Yankee-Canuck and retired minister of the Christian Reformed Church, living in Grand Rapids, MI

Pastors of the CRC who served churches prior to 1960

Henry Bajema, 1959-64, Lacombe, Alberta
J. E. Brink, 1955-57, Emo, Ont.
S.G. Brondsema, 1940-43, Lacombe, 1949-56 Brampton, Toronto, etc.
Sid Cooper, 1956-60, Sarnia, Ont.
Peter Dahm, 1959-63, Leamington, Ont.
John M. Dykstra, 1952-59, Jarvis, Ont
Sam Dykstra, 1945-50, Hamilton, Ont.
John C. Ehlers, 1953-64, Mount Hamilton, Ont.
Andrew Folkema, 1952-57 Drayton, Ont.
Walter Hekman, 1953-59, St. Thomas, Ont.
John J. Holwerda, 1956-61, Port Alberni, B.C..
Rens H. Hooker, 1954-59, Cornwall, Ont.
James Huizenga,.1959-64, Terrace, B.C.
Albert Huls,.1959-62, Blenheim, Ont.
Elbert Kooistra, 1952-56, Fruitland, Ont.
J. Koopmans, 1958-61, Aylmer, Ont.
Peter Kranenburg, 1957-60, Athens, Ont., etc.
J. G. Kunst, 1958-61, Cambridge, Ont.
Gerrit A. Lyzenga, 1950-50, Jarvis, Ont.
Lambertus Mulder, 1952-57, Neerlandia, Alberta, 1957-61 Fort William, Ont., etc.
Gerard Nonnekes, 1958-64, Jasper Place, Edmonton, etc.
Jelle Nutma, 1959-63, Acton, Ont., etc.
John W. Postman, 1959-64, Haney, B.C., etc.
Jack Quartel, 1956-61, Wyoming, Ont., etc.
Arend Rumph, 1957-60, Cobourg, Ont., etc.
Louis Tamminga, 1957-60, Telkwa & Smithers, B. C., etc.
Hans Uittenbosch, 1957-60, Renfrew, Ont., etc.
Gerald Van Der Berg, *1958-62, Nobleford, Alberta*
William Vander Beek, 1955-58, Brooks, Alberta, etc.
Hiram Vanderklay,. 1952-61, Owen Sound, Ont.
Peter Vandyk, 1949-52, Nobleford, Alberta
John Vandyke,.1959-62, Burlington, Ont., etc.
Arie Van Eek, 1958-62, Exeter, Ont., etc.
Peter Van Egmond, 1957-60, Iron Springs, Alberta, 1960-65 Wellandport, Ont., etc.
John Vandyk, 1956-59, Burlington, Ont., 1959-62 Kentville, Nova Scotia, etc.
R. Wildschut 1945-47, Burdett, 1945-50 Granum, Alberta, 1953-59 Springdale, Ont.
Cornelius Witt, 1950-58, Trenton, Ont.
Marten Woudstra, 1953-55, Third Edmonton, Alberta.

... Continued from page 17

population the 1991 figure was 67 percent; in 1994, 75 percent.) I do wonder about those numbers. Are so many Christians who say that they take Scripture and the God of Scripture seriously oblivious to the contradiction between their Christian faith and the absence of absolute truth?

In any case, the avoidance of this philosophy of public education and its replacement with one that honors God in Christ as the Truth (and Way and Life) is one of many good rationales for comprehensive Christian education.

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier *from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY; she may be contacted via e-mail at <mvantil@adelphia.net>.*

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Friday **October 21**, *8:00 PM*
Covenant Christian Reformed Church,
278 Parnell Rd, ***St. Catharines***, *ON*
Admission: $15
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Saturday, **October 22**, *2005, 8:00 PM*
St. George's Anglican Church,
Woolwich Street, **Guelph**, *ON Admission: $15*

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Classifieds

Anniversaries

1955 2005
Hamilton, Ontario St.Catharines, Ontario

With praise and thanksgiving to the LORD
we celebrate with our parents and grandparents

KEES AND DOROTHY VANDERLEEK
(nee **Uitterdijk**)

their **50th Wedding Anniversary.**
We pray that the Lord will continue to surround you with his loving care all the days of your life.

With love from your children and grandchildren:
Wilma & Edward Mclaughlin, *Edmonton, AB*
Casey & Albert
Gordon & Annie vanderLeek, *Calgary, AB*
Dianne, Samantha, Nicole, Brandon, Matthew
Henry vanderLeek & Wendy, *Niagara on the Lake*
Caroline vanderLeek & Darrell, *Thorold, ON*

You are invited to an **Open House**
Saturday, October 1 from 1:30 - 4:00
at Covenant Christian Reformed Church
278 Parnell Rd, St. Catharines, Ontario

Home address: 68 Dunkeld Ave
St Catharines ON L2M 4A7

1960 September 23 2005

For the LORD is good and his love endures forever: his faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 100:5

With praise and thanksgiving to the LORD,
we celebrate with our parents

LOUIS AND EFFIE BIERLING (nee **Brouwer**)

their **45th Wedding Anniversary.**
We pray that our faithful Heavenly Father may lead you all the days of your life.

With love from your children and grandchildren:
Peter & Jackie Bierling, *Brampton, ON*
Joshua, Aaron, Scott
Gerald & Colleen Bierling, *Hamilton, ON*
Jason, Vanessa
Marvin & Margherita Bierling, *Strathroy, ON*
Corina, Alyson, Ada
Tammy & Mike Hoving, *Holland Landing, ON*
Jacob, Daniel

Home address: 19400 Dufferin Street
Newmarket ON L3Y 4V9

louis.bierling@sympatico.ca

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your ways. Prov. 3:5,6

1955 September 21 2005

With thanksgiving to God for his Faithfulness, we are celebrating the **50th Anniversary** of our parents and grandparents

BILL AND FLORA DENBOK (nee **Tigchelaar**)

We are thankful for their love and guidance and pray for the LORD's continued daily grace & strength.

William & Sharon Denbok, *London, Ontario*
Adam & Nicole Cake, Hank, Matthew, Jessica, Zachary
Clarence Denbok, *Edmonton, Alberta*
Martine, Timothy, Helena
Ann & Arnold Jagt, *Howell, Michigan*
Aaron, Joanna, Rose, Phillip, Victoria, Leah
Helena & John Leyenhorst, *Jordan, Ontario*
Jonathan, Michelle & Bryden, Kristina, Nicole
Gerry & Susan Denbok, *Kwai Chung, Hong Kong*
Jeremy
Kathleen & John Mensonides, *Modesto, California*
Kendra, Krista, Kelsea, Jason

An **Open House** will be held Saturday,
Sept. 24, 2005 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
at Cornerstone United Reformed Church
180 Waterloo St. London, Ontario
Best Wishes only please.

Home address: 1842 Park Ave
London ON N5W 2J8

Grand Rapids December 16 Oakville
1955 2005

With thankfulness and praise to God
we celebrate the **50th Wedding Anniversary** of

HANS AND TRUDY UITTENBOSCH
(nee **SCHURINGA**)

We deeply appreciate your love, prayers, guidance, and example,
as you have trained us in the way we should go.
May our merciful and steadfast God continue to turn his face toward you and bless you abundantly!

Your loving children and grandchildren:
Marcel & Gwen Uittenbosch, *Calgary*
Chelsey, Carisa, Courtney
Selwyn & Helen Uittenbosch. *Abbotsford*
Derrick, Trevor, Kristyn, Stephanie
Desiree & Kevin Francisco, *Calgary*
Graham, Lauryn

You are cordially invited to an **Open House** in the Party Room at 1903 Pilgrims Way, Oakville on October 1, 2005 from 3 - 5 p.m.
Best Wishes Only

Correspondence address: 1901 Pilgrims Way #303
Oakville ON L6M 2W9

huseafarers@juno.com

Gramsbergen Sheffield Mills
The Netherlands Nova Scotia, Canada
1955 September 23 2005

The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever more. Ps.121:8

With thanksgiving and praise to the LORD
for his faithfulness we celebrate the
50th Wedding Anniversary of

ALBERT AND JANNA GERRITS (nee **Jurjens**)

We pray that the LORD will continue to bless you and keep you in his care.

With love and thanksgiving from your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchild.
Bernard & Renee Gerrits –
Nadia, Jeremy, Naomi, Eli, Jason, Emma
Klaas & Bernadine Gerrits – Rachel, Isaac, Hannah
Jane & Gerald Kamphuis –
Alissa, Martin, Kristopher, Anthony
Henk & Beverly Gerrits – Jacob, Ethan
Albert & Annette – Johnathan, Lauren, Andrew
Anita & Brian Smit – Lucas & Liana, Kalana

We invite you to join us for an **Open House**
at the Sheffield Mills Community Hall on
Friday, September 23, 2005 from 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.
Best Wishes only.

Home address: 8789 Hwy. 221 RR5
Canning NS B0P 1H0

1965 September 24 2005
Strathroy, Ontario Listowel, Ontario

MENNO AND EFFIE ELKEMA (nee **Klinker**)

We praise and thank God for our parents who will be celebrating their **40th Wedding Anniversary.**

With love from your children and grandchildren:
Brian & Lisa Eelkema *Barrie, Ont.*
Alaina, Jenna, Mark
Jacqueline & Frank Geerlinks *St.Thomas, Ont.*
Emily, Wesley
Selia & Fred Koops *Ingersoll, Ont.*
Claire, Bridget, Adrienne
Alice & Rick Meloche *Hamilton, Ont.*
Jessica, Rebecca, Leah
Brenda & Greg Hiemstra *London, Ont.*
Zachary, Michaela
Sara & Mark Verkuyl *Woodstock Ont.*
Krista Eelkema *Waterloo, Ont.*

We invite you to join us for an **Open House** on Saturday, September 24 from 2:00 - 4:30 at the Listowel Christian School.

Home address: RR3, Listowel ON N4W 3G8

Memorial

In loving memory of our parents

GERRIT JAN & AALTJE ROSEBOOM
(nee **Kikkert**)

who passed away July 11, 2002
and September 10, 2000.

In God's promise of eternal life, we will meet again as God calls us home, one by one.
Missing you more each day.

Your children: John, Hennie, Grace, Ray, Elly, Jack, Lloyd, Gary and Tony.

Obituaries

The Lord took unto himself

JOYCE (Joukje) BISSCHOP

on Wednesday August 10, 2005 in her 96th year at Grace Manor, Brampton.

Beloved wife of the late Geert Bisschop.
Loving mother of Clarence (Theresa) Bishop, Ann (Ron) Brooks, Grace (Jack) Feddema, Tina (Dale) Scheer, Jake (Barbara) Bisschop, Lawrence (Anne) Bisschop and the late John Ralph Bisschop (1969).
Cherished grandmother of 18, great-grandmother of 34.
Predeceased by grandson Ralph Edward (1961).
Dear sister of Frances Vander Zwaag (Netherlands)
Predeceased by brothers Jan and George and sister Tryntje.

The funeral service was held on Monday, August 15th at Oshawa Funeral Service "Thornton Chapel".

Correspondence: Jack & Grace Feddema
45 Deerpark, Bowmanville ON L1C 3M4

The Lord took unto himself, at the age of 47 years, after a courageous battle with cancer, our dear niece and cousin

HELEN EISING (nee **Rumph**)

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. 2 Cor. 5:1

May this be the comfort for her husband Arnold, and daughters Melanie Janis, Sharilynn and Karina as they mourn the loss of a dear wife and mother.

Arnold & Ann Marie Rumph, *St Petersburg Fl*
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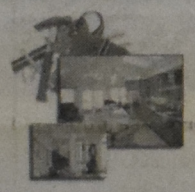

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Wm. Wildeboer (email wilel@telus.net)
or Wayne Bouwman (bouwmanwj@telus.net),
or mail to church address:
Bethel CRC, 5704-51 Ave Lacombe, Alberta, Canada T4L 1K8

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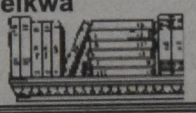

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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Sept 11 - Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Hellinga will be preaching.

Sept 23-25 Reformed **Marriage Encounter** Weekend, **London**, ON For registration and info, e-mail : james.kulyk@sympatico.ca Phone: 905-987-4272 (See ad this issue)

Oct 1 Connect 2005: a conference for anyone involved in children's and youth ministry at ClearView CRC, **Oakville**. Co-sponsored by the Ontario Christian Reformed Church School Association and Ontario GEMS. Call 519-664-2376 for more information or register online at www.clearviewchurch.com/connect2005.html by Sept. 25.

Oct 1 & 2 Bethel Christian Reformed Church, **Newmarket**, Ontario. 50th anniversary weekend of celebration. Former member and friends invited. To obtain tickets to attend the Saturday dinner and for more information, call John VanLeeuwen at 905-775-0367 Ph., 905- 775-8295 Fax, or jvanle0431@rogers.com

Oct 15 Netherlands **Bazaar**, **Thornhill** Community Centre, 7755 Bayview Avenue, **Thornhill**. Market Place 10:00 a.m.- 6:00 p.m. Features: Restaurants with Dutch delicacies, live music, bake-sale, groceries, Delft Blue pottery, gifts, handicrafts, Draw and Auction 6:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m. Admission free. For info, call 905-477-1243 or 416-223-5026

Oct 15 A **Day of Encouragement** and training for deacons, elders and all other interested church members at Hamilton Dist. Christian High School in **Ancaster**. Theme: Take Root & Bear Fruit. Choose from 48 workshops and 21 "Service Sites". All sessions are open to everyone. Cost $50. Contact your deacons for a registration form, or Diaconal Ministries at (905) 336-2920 or visit us at www.diaconalministries.com

Oct 19 Organ/Piano/Flute Concert, York Christian Reformed Church, **York** ON 8:p.m. Admission $10 See ad this issue or www.organs.ca

Oct 20 Organ/Piano/Flute Concert with "Make a joyful noise" Covenant Christian School choir, Ebenezer Canadian Reformed church, **Burlington** ON 7:30 pm. See ad

Oct 21 Full concert with the Liberation Choir, Covenant Christian Reformed Church, 278 Parnell Rd, **St.Catherines**, ON Admission $15 See ad or www.organs.ca

Oct 22 Full concert with the Liberation Choir, St. George's Anglican Church, 99 Woolwich, Guelph, ON Admission $15 See ad or www.organs.ca

Nov. 4-6 Reformed **Marriage Encounter** Weekend, **Peterborough**, ON. For registration and info, e-mail : james.kulyk@sympatico.ca Phone: 905-987-4272 (See ad this issue)

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Fidel Castro offers support to build evangelical churches

HAVANA – President Fidel Castro will provide facilities to help Evangelical Churches build new churches and develop their pastoral mission, said the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Samuel Kobia, who met the Cuban leader in Havana at the beginning of August.

Small church in Fomento Cuba

The interview with Castro, which Kobia described as a "very good meeting" addressed different issues, in particular church-state relations on the Island and the challenge represented by the growth of Cuban Evangelical Churches in recent years.

According to the WCC leader, Castro was positive about his request to allow the construction of new churches and said that his "government does not have any limitations on the growth of churches and supports these constructions."

Rev. Kobia spoke with the press at the end of a four-day pastoral visit to Cuban Churches, his first since beginning as WCC secretary general in 2004.

He placed special emphasis on his organization's concern about the US blockade against Cuba. "The WCC is emphatically opposed to the blockade," he said and asked that it be immediately lifted, arguing that it should be considered "from a humanitarian and ethnical perspective."

He complained that the new measures decreed by US President George Bush adds other limitations to the blockade such as restricting the number of visits from relatives of Cubans who live in North America.

Kobia, a Methodist pastor from Kenya, deplored the fact that terrorism is frequently talked about in a selective matter when it involves some countries.

"We must respond to challenges proposed by terrorism in any of its manifestations," he said, including terrorist acts against Cuba.

He affirmed that the phenomenon of violence affects all societies in the world, as domestic violence, violence in the cities, including social and economic violence and violence against the environment.

"We live in a broken, fractured world. I have visited all the regions of the world and there is a great feeling of dissatisfaction and insecurity on the part of all people in the world," he said.

He said that the next WCC general assembly, to be held in Porto Alegre in February 2006 will address the issue of violence and specifically economic justice, with an emphasis on economic globalization and its impact on people.

Kobia said that today's world needs peace more than ever and said that the time has come for joint work between Christian churches and other religious organizations. For this reason, the WCC is focused on inter-religious dialogue on the issues of peace and reconciliation.

However, he warned that it is urgent to establish alliances between the churches, governments and social organizations to respond to the challenges raised by peace "because we have a debt with future generations to transmit a world that is more peaceful, more reconciled and more participatory than the world in which we live in today," he concluded.

Dorm room arrangement goes electronic

A Calvin student's imaginative program for arranging a residence hall room has landed her two nominations in the 2005 Macromedia Student Innovation Award Program.

Emily Brondsema, a junior from Midland, Michigan, majoring in Spanish and visual communications, has been nominated in the program's "People's Choice Award" and "Editorial Award" categories for her work on "The Dormulator," an online program that allows students to view a virtual image of a residence hall room, scaled to the dimensions of an actual Calvin dorm room, and to arrange the room, rotate its furniture and change the furniture colors.

Though she based it on a similar program from another university's website, Brondsema has added several distinctive features to the Calvin version. For example, because the furniture in Calvin residence halls is stackable, Brondsema designed her virtual room using an isometric view – an approach commonly used in technical illustrations. Using this angled perspective, the virtual designer can see which furniture arrangements are actually workable and which are not.

Brondsema's program also allows users to add personal touches to their virtual rooms: a poster of a favorite musician, band or movie and a fishbowl complete with a swimming goldfish. And the virtual view from the dorm room window is a shot of the campus from the Calvin webcam.

As for the Macromedia contest Brondsema says it's "cool" that she's one of the finalists in a worldwide competition (her fellow nominees hail from places such as Singapore and the Netherlands) but she says the real reward was the project itself.

"It was a lot of fun to do," she says, "because I got to play around and learn a lot of new things."

The Macromedia Student Innovation Awards are open to entries that were created using Macromedia products. If The Dormulator, made using Macromedia's Flash, Fireworks and Dreamweaver programs, wins the "People's Choice Award" category, Brondsema will receive an iPod; if the program wins an "Editorial Award," she will receive $1,000.

Since its June launch, The Dormulator has received over 14,000 hits, and over 1,000 room configurations have been saved to the database by visitors who e-mailed their room designs to friends and family.

News Digest

Sharia

An international campaign against sharia has been launched against Ontario's decision to allow a place for sharia courts in Ontario. It includes several dozen different groups which were planning protests in Britiain, The Netherlands, Germany and Sweden as well as in Canada. The groups fear that the move will undermine the rights of women.

"It is a battle to control the discourse of the religion. In Canada, political Islamists are using the tool of multiculturalism and freedom of culture and religion to oppress women. The introduction of sharia courts in Ontario would send the wrong message to the world," said Ms. Homa Arjomand, who fled Iran in 1989 and settled in Toronto.

Ontario's Arbitration Act (1991) allows for voluntary faith-based arbitration to resolve civil and family-law disputes. Under this provision Muslims, Jews and other religious groups may use the principles of their faith to settle matters such as divorce, inheritance and custody outside the court system – but only if both parties agree.

In theory, faith-based arbitration must comply with Canadian civil law and decisions may be appealed. But in reality, says Arjomand, many Muslim women are often isolated and intimidated, with no idea what their rights are under Canadian law.

Majority-Minority

The U.S. Census Bureau has declared Texas a Majority-Minority state. That means minorities are now in the majority. But doesn't this mean that whites are actually the minority? Not according to the census bureau. Whites remain the majority even when they're not. Well, that's not quite true, say the census people. If you're one of those who belong to the group called Hispanics, you may still be regarded as minority even if you're white.

Of course, in the lexicon of race, you may be three quarters white and still be classified as black. Those in charge of sorting out whites from native Americans when dispensing government largesse are running into problems too. It is now cool to be native American in some quarters. If you're one-sixteenth native American, do you still belong? How about one-eighth? One-quarter? One-half?

For the purposes of the US census bureau Asians all belong to one race; yet, the differences between people from India, from Japan and from Korea are as pronounced as those between whites and Hispanics. And as more of the world becomes a melting pot and young people fall in love, the labels of the census people look more and more arbitrary.

Creationism, Intelligent Design, evolution

According to a recent U.S. poll, fully two-thirds of Americans think creationism should be taught alongside evolution in the schools, and 38 percent think creationism should replace the teaching of evolution. That should drive the organization of science teachers into a frenzy. In interviews with science teachers that I've seen on television, some develop an almost hysterical screech as they insist that evolution is not merely a theory, it is science, it has been tested, it is fact.

But polls reveal all sorts of contradictions, for almost half of Americans also believe that human beings evolved.

"It's like they're saying, 'Some people see it this way, some see it that way, so just teach it all and let the kids figure it out,'" commented Prof. John Green of the Pew Forum, which conducted the poll. "It seems like a nice compromise, but it infuriates both the creationists and the scientists."

President George Bush recently created a furor among academics (and glee among cartoonists) when he recommended that Intelligent Design be taught alongside the theory of evolution. Many commentators failed to make any distinctions between Intelligent Design (ID) and creationism, while proponents of ID hammered insistently on the distinction. And then there were those who argued that the process of evolution is intelligently designed. In the newspapers, on television and on the internet, the debate is evolving into a rancorous quarrel that often shows little design and little intelligence, and destroys any notion that we are evolving to a higher level of humanity.